

**‘The Return to the People’:
Empire, Class, and Religion in Lady Gregory’s Dramatic Works**

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Abstract

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This thesis examines a selection of Lady Gregory’s original dramatic works. Between the opening of the Abbey Theatre in 1904 and the playwright’s death in 1932, Gregory’s plays accounted for the highest number of stage productions in comparison to her co-directors William Butler Yeats and John Millington Synge. As such, this thesis analyses examples ranging from her most well-known and successful pieces, including *The Rising of the Moon* and *The Gaol Gate*, to lesser known plays such as *The Wrens*, *The White Cockade*, *Shanwalla* and *Dave*. With a focus on the historical, bibliographical, and political contexts, the plays are analysed not only with regard to the printed texts, but also in the context of theatrical performances. In order to re-evaluate Gregory’s contribution to the Abbey, this thesis is divided into three chapters dealing with dominant themes throughout her career as a playwright: Empire, class, and religion.

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In memory of two formidable grandmothers

Elizabeth Pilz (1931-1996) and Gertrud Schulz (1924-2012)

Abbreviations

The following is a key to abbreviations used in this study.

Berg	Lady Gregory collection of papers, 1873-[1965] bulk (1873-1932). The Berg Collection of English and American Literature, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations, New York City.
ed.	edited by
eds	editors
Emory	Robert W. Woodruff Library, Emory University, Atlanta
n.d.	no date given
NLI	National Library of Ireland, Dublin
n.y.	no year given
rev.	revised
rev. edn.	revised edition

The following abbreviations are used for frequently cited texts.

CL	John S. Kelly (ed.), <i>The Collected Letters of W.B. Yeats</i> (Oxford University Press (IntelLex Electronic Edition) 2002).
CPI	Lady Augusta Gregory, <i>The Collected Plays, I, The Comedies</i> , ed. Ann Saddlemyer (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe and Irish University Press, 1971).
CP II	Lady Augusta Gregory, <i>The Collected Plays, II, The Tragedies and Tragic-Comedies</i> , ed. Ann Saddlemyer (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe and Irish University Press, 1971).
CP III	Lady Augusta Gregory, <i>The Collected Plays, III, The Wonder and Supernatural Plays</i> , ed. Ann Saddlemyer (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1979).
CP IV	Lady Augusta Gregory, <i>The Collected Plays, IV, The Translations and Adaptations of Lady Gregory and Her Collaborations with Douglas Hyde and W.B. Yeats</i> , ed. Ann Saddlemyer (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1979).

- Diaries* James Pethica (ed.), *Lady Gregory's Diaries 1892-1902* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1996).
- Journals I* D.J. Murphy (ed.), *Lady Gregory's Journals: Volume One, Books 1-29, 10 October 1916-24 February 1925* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1978).
- Journals II* D.J. Murphy (ed.), *Lady Gregory's Journals: Volume Two, Books 30-44, 21 February 1925-9 May 1932* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1987).

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Introduction

Lady Gregory's work must be well treated – she is the best 'draw' of the lot of you. I am so proud of her because she makes the people laugh in a witty manner.

- Annie Horniman¹

Being a writer for comedy, her life as an artist has not shaken in her, as tragic art would have done, the conventional standards. Besides, she has never been part of the artist's world, she has belonged to a political world, or one that is merely social.

- Yeats, *Memoirs*²

In 1928, towards the end of her life, Lady Gregory quoted a review of her *Three Last Plays* from *The Spectator* which asked whether 'there could have been an Irish Theatre at all' without her. She answered with confidence in her journal: '(No, there could not. That's Poz)'.³ Whilst reading through some of her old letters six years previously, Gregory had expressed her amazement as to the organizational task:

I marvelled to find how much of time and energy was not only used, but as it seems squandered, on the endless affairs of the Abbey Theatre, almost crushing out, as it seems, other interests; the effort to maintain discipline, the staging, the reading of plays, the choice of plays, the quarrels among players, the suspicion of politicians and of the authorities, anxieties about money.

'As to playwriting', Gregory added briefly, 'it came as if by accident'.⁴

Her friends and colleagues praised the multitude of her skills and role as patron and patentee of the theatre. Wilfrid Scawen Blunt – Gregory's short-term lover and long-term friend – noted that:

she has been the real inspirer of the Irish Literary movement having created Yeats out of almost nothing and half the young Irishmen who now have names, while the Abbey Theatre has been wholly her work. [...] She is an admirable writer,

¹ Annie Horniman to W.B. Yeats (26 November 1906) in Ann Saddlemyer (ed.), *Theatre Business: The Correspondence of the first Abbey Theatre Directors* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1982), p. 162.

² [8 August 1910], William Butler Yeats, *Memoirs*, ed. Denis Donoghue (London: Macmillan, 1972), pp. 257-258.

³ Entry for 10 July 1928, D.J. Murphy (ed.), *Lady Gregory's Journals: Volume Two, Books 30-44, 21 February 1925-9 May 1932* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1987), p. 291. Hereafter cited as *Journals II*.

⁴ Lady Gregory, *Seventy Years*, ed. Colin Smythe (New York: Macmillan, 1974), pp. 411, 412.

something of a poet, a good speaker & lecturer & an entirely practical business woman.⁵

To George Bernard Shaw she was the ‘charwoman of the Abbey’.⁶ One of the movement’s earliest critics equally noted: ‘she has been one of the forces that have made possible the Abbey Theatre’.⁷ Despite Blunt’s references to her literary output, it appears that Gregory as hostess, patron, friend, manager, fundraiser, skilled adviser and director takes precedence over Gregory as a playwright. If mentioned at all, it is suggested that she owed her playwriting to her protégé. Alice Milligan, in an article on ‘Yeats and the Drama’ in 1906, asked: ‘is [Yeats] not to be credited with having turned Lady Gregory from the pathos of magazine literature and essay writing and of having commanded her to be a comedian?’⁸ To some extent, this was a perception she herself had nurtured with remarks such as the one she made in an interview whilst on tour with the Abbey company in America: ‘Mr. Yeats had the vision: I had only the practicality’.⁹ Through her involvement in the Irish Literary Revival and her association with the leading literary and political figures of her time, Gregory has achieved some form of status in contemporary culture that adds to the already established list of her talents, interests and preoccupations.

In 2011, Colm Tóibín’s acclaimed collection *The Empty Family* featured a short story about Gregory’s brief love affair with Blunt, offering a humanized portrayal of her otherwise more austere reputation. In ‘Silence’, we encounter her as a young woman whose marriage to someone much older lacks emotional depth, and her longing for passion is ignited by the

⁵ Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, ‘Secret Diaries 1913-14’ quoted in Bernadette Sweeney, ‘Keeping the House: Augusta Gregory and the National Theatre of Ireland’, in Paul Fryer (ed.), *Women in the Arts in the Belle Epoque: Essays on Influential Artists, Writers and Performers* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2012), p. 139.

⁶ George Bernard Shaw quoted in Lady Gregory, *Selected Writings*, ed. Lucy McDiarmid and Maureen Waters (London/New York etc: Penguin Books, 1995), p. xxix.

⁷ Cornelius Weygandt, *Irish Plays and Playwrights* (Boston/New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1913), p. 158.

⁸ Alice L. Milligan, ‘Yeats and the Drama’, *Sinn Féin* (31 December 1906), p. 1, in Robert Hogan and James Kilroy (eds), *The Abbey Theatre: The Years of Synge 1905-1909* (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1978), p. 120.

⁹ Interview in *The American Magazine* (March 1912), quoted in James Pethica, ‘A Dialogue of Self and Service: Lady Gregory’s Emergence as an Irish Writer and Partnership with W.B. Yeats’ (unpublished D.Phil. thesis, University of Oxford, 1987), pp. 3-4.

charming serial adulterer.¹⁰ When Lucy McDiarmid lectured on Gregory's love sonnets to Blunt at the Lady Gregory Autumn Gathering of 2012, the *Galway Advertiser* commented on the 'jaw-dropping moments' with regard to these revelations about a woman who, it was noted, is 'usually portrayed as a prim Victorian matron of virtue'.¹¹

It is in this latter regard that Joseph O'Connor pictures Gregory in his novel *Ghost Light* (2010), which centres on J.M. Synge's relationship with the actress, Molly Allgood. Here, we see Gregory – referred to as 'Her Ladyship' – chastising her fellow director for fraternising with someone 'of a differing social order'. O'Connor delights in the exposure of her snobbishness, as Gregory's character curtly summarizes that 'some of us are bequeathed our furniture. Whereas others buy and sell it as a living'.¹² With this emphasis on class consciousness, it comes perhaps as no surprise that, most recently, Gregory made it into one of Maggie Smith's punch lines in ITV's successful series *Downton Abbey*. 'Lady Gregory, Countess Markievicz', the Dowager Countess of Grantham wonders, 'why are the Irish rebels so well born?'¹³ These popular representations hint toward an ambiguity in Gregory's life and character: Victorian values versus adultery; snobbery and social standing versus republican nationalism. Nowhere, however, between this eclectic mixture of Gregory as lover, matron and rebel lurks Gregory the playwright.

'The bread and butter' of the Abbey Theatre

Yeats's proclamation that 'life as an artist has not shaken in her' and his dismissive proclivity to perceive her as 'a writer of comedy' in combination with his assertion that 'she has belonged to a political world, or one that is merely social' foreshadowed, as well as directed,

¹⁰ Colm Tóibín, 'Silence', in *The Empty Family* (London: Penguin, 2011), pp. 14-28.

¹¹ Ronnie O'Gorman, 'Lady Gregory's Secret, and other frailties...', *Galway Advertiser* (4 October 2012), p. 35.

¹² Joseph O'Connor, *Ghost Light* (London: Vintage, 2011), pp. 71, 72.

¹³ Julian Fellowes, *Downton Abbey*, 3.4, ITV1 (7 October 2012).

scholars' attention toward Gregory's life rather than her work as a dramatist.¹⁴ Yet between the opening of the Abbey Theatre in 1904 and Gregory's death in 1932, the playwright accounted for the highest number of stage productions in comparison to Yeats and Synge, her co-directors of the early years of Ireland's national theatre. This tremendous visibility was based, however, primarily on less than a dozen of over forty plays.¹⁵ To illustrate this, we can rely on statistical evidence drawn from the Abbey Theatre's online archive and compare the figures for Gregory with those of Yeats and Synge.¹⁶ The data collected incorporates productions of 38 plays. As Figure 1 indicates, in the period under consideration Gregory accounted for 2584 stage productions. She is followed by Yeats with 1059 productions; J.M. Synge accounted for 1008 productions.

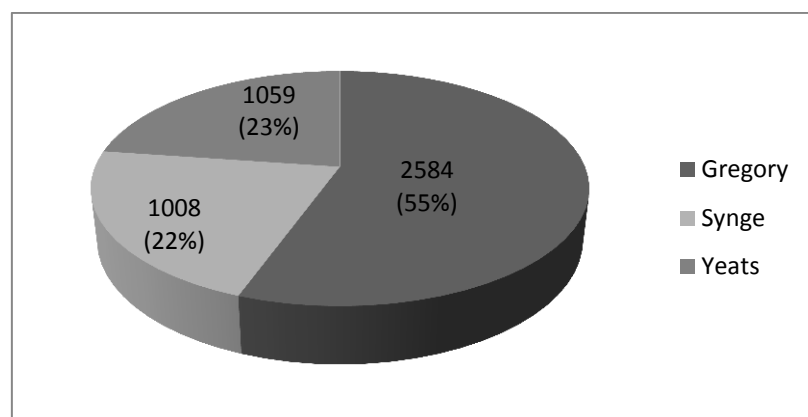


Figure 1 Production of Plays 1904-1932

¹⁴ [8 August 1910], Yeats, *Memoirs*, pp. 257-258.

¹⁵ Out of Gregory's oeuvre of 42 plays, 31 are original dramatic works with a further 7 translations/adaptations and 4 collaborations.

¹⁶ Abbey Theatre Online Archive, http://www.abbeytheatre.ie/archives/person_detail/15151; http://www.abbeytheatre.ie/archives/person_detail/13787; http://www.abbeytheatre.ie/archives/person_detail/14121. Accessed 24.06.2013. All subsequent data regarding numbers of productions have been drawn from this source. Note that the database is constantly updated and does not include a complete listing of productions.

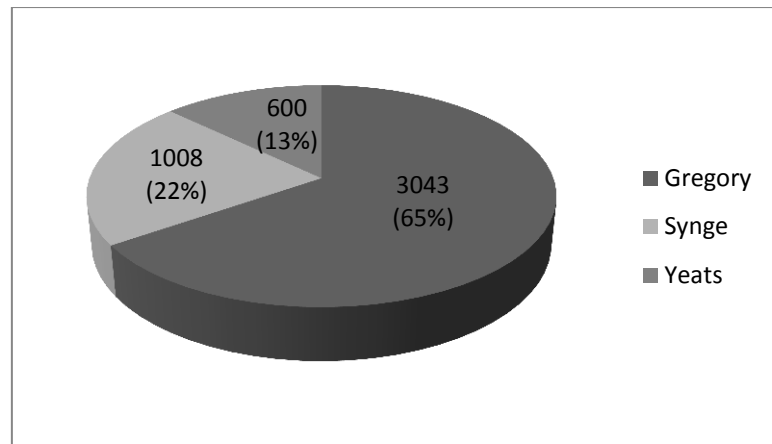


Figure 2 Production of Plays 1904-1932
(*Cathleen ni Houlihan* in Gregory's data)

Gregory's most popular plays – reaching a production number that exceeds 100 – were *The Rising of the Moon* (524), *The Workhouse Ward* (416), *Spreading the News* (353), *Hyacinth Halvey* (349), *The Jackdaw* (175) and *The Gaol Gate* (170). With the exception of the latter, these are all comedies. The majority of her plays, however, did not reach more than 50 performances. In contrast, Yeats – equally prolific in playwriting – accounts for only two plays that made it above the benchmark: *Cathleen ni Houlihan* (459) and *A Pot of Broth* (129). His third most successful play in the period is *Deirdre* with 52 productions. Considering that Gregory's part in writing *Cathleen ni Houlihan* has been acknowledged, and that she also contributed to *A Pot of Broth*, her role as collaborator would enlarge her presence on the Abbey stage even further. Thus, if *Cathleen ni Houlihan* is taken out of Yeats's share and added to Gregory's in the spirit of Lennox Robinson's proposition that 'the authorship of the play should be ascribed to her' – just for the purposes of illustration – she accounts for 65 per cent of productions among the three (see Figure 2).¹⁷ As Daniel Murphy

¹⁷ Lennox Robinson quoted in James Pethica, "'Our Kathleen': Yeats's Collaboration with Lady Gregory in the Writing of *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*", in Deirdre Toomey (ed.), *Yeats and Women* (London: Macmillan, 1997), p. 219.

suggests, ‘there were simply too many performances of plays by Lady Gregory without unnecessarily appending her name to a whole block of others’.¹⁸

Gregory even outshines Synge when it comes to individual production numbers. *The Playboy of the Western World* reached 355 productions and *In the Shadow of the Glen* was produced 264 times. These figures substantiate, however, only partly Synge’s complaint that the Abbey had developed into a ‘Yeats-Gregory show’.¹⁹ It was, in fact, far more akin to a one-woman show. R.F. Foster notes that ‘Gregory’s undemanding plays were the bread and butter of the repertoire’.²⁰ It is precisely the aim of this study to bring Gregory’s dramatic texts centre stage and re-evaluate their contribution to the theatre.

In the autumn of 1897, Gregory was staying at Count de Basterot’s home at Duras House in Co. Galway when Edward Martyn, accompanied by Yeats, paid a visit. Over afternoon tea, Gregory and Yeats discussed the state of Irish drama and, soon thereafter, a manifesto was sent out for a subscription to the Irish Literary Theatre, founded by Gregory, Yeats, Martyn and George Moore. Among the guarantors were mainly friends and acquaintances of Gregory’s social circle, many of whom attended the first performances at the Antient Concert Rooms in May 1899.²¹ Three years later, the amateur players of the Fay brothers joined the endeavour that became the Irish National Theatre Society and which produced Gregory’s play *Twenty Five* in March 1903 at Molesworth Hall, Dublin. After the English heiress and theatre lover, Miss Annie Horniman, ensured through her generous patronage the conversion of the Mechanics Institute in Abbey Street, the Abbey Theatre opened its doors on 27 December 1904 under the triumvirate of directors Gregory, Yeats, and

¹⁸ Daniel Murphy, ‘Yeats and Lady Gregory: A Unique Dramatic Collaboration’, *Modern Drama*, VIII (December 1964), pp. 325-326.

¹⁹ J.M. Synge to Molly Allgood (21 March 1907) in Ann Saddlemyer (ed.), *The Collected Letters of John Millington Synge – Volume One, 1871-1907* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), p. 246.

²⁰ R.F. Foster, *Paddy and Mr Punch – Connections in Irish and English History* (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1995), p. 203.

²¹ Adrian Frazier, *Behind the Scenes: Yeats, Horniman, and the Struggle for the Abbey Theatre* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), p. 1.

Synge. This sketches in brief Gregory's involvement in the evolution of what became Ireland's national theatre. Initially, she fertilized the discussion and proposed an Irish theatre in Dublin; her network supplied vital financial support; and slowly, but steadily, she emerged as one of its key playwrights.

The Abbey opened with a triple bill. As the *Irish Times* noted, following Yeats's poetic drama *On Baile's Strand*, and his and Gregory's collaborative play *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, 'the audience were in a mood to appreciate a sprightly bit of comedy', and Gregory's play *Spreading the News* 'supplied that need most soothingly'.²² Her plays were received, from the outset, as light-hearted comic interludes, relieving the minds of the audience from Yeats's more challenging prose drama. The playwright presented her work as such: 'The circumstances of our Theatre have forced me to write comedy. The strain of the attention necessary for listening to verse requires a relaxing afterwards'.²³ Significantly, the *Irish Times*' review of the opening performances positively remarked on the National Theatre Society Limited as a 'company [...] of unsalaried amateurs, whose enthusiasm as *art revivalists* has been the sole guiding star' [my italics].²⁴ Classifying the literary enterprise as a purely artistic endeavour, the press bought into the original manifesto for the Irish Literary Theatre which Gregory, reflecting on the beginning of the theatre movement in *Our Irish Theatre*, described as 'a little pompous'.²⁵

The combination of the theatre's proclaimed 'no politics' and the genre of comedy limited a contemporary political interpretation. Desmond MacCarthy, reviewing the play for *The Speaker*, a British periodical of Liberal politics, commented that 'It is most refreshing to

²² *The Irish Times* (28 December 1904), p. 5.

²³ Lady Gregory, 'Making A Play', undated unpublished lecture, Lady Gregory collection of papers, 1873-1965] bulk (1873-1932). The Berg Collection of English and American Literature, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations, New York City. Hereafter cited as Berg.

²⁴ *The Irish Times* (28 December 1904), p. 5.

²⁵ Lady Gregory, *Our Irish Theatre: A Chapter of Autobiography* (London/New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1913), p. 8.

see, for once, an absolutely unintellectual comedy'.²⁶ In the nationalist press, there was an equal lack of engaging criticism as *The Freeman's Journal* articulated that 'Lady Gregory's new "Comedy" relieved the atmosphere of tragedy'.²⁷ The 'substance' of plays such as *Spreading the News*, Ernest Boyd wrote in his study of *Contemporary Drama of Ireland*, was 'too slight to bear summary'.²⁸ This judgment of her initial entrance onto the Abbey stage as 'undemanding' and 'unintellectual' entertainment impeded, perhaps, a closer consideration of the seriousness of her dramatic work.

Gregory's plays remain comparatively neglected by literary critics and theatre historians alike who hitherto have concentrated on her life and association with the Revival's key figure, W.B. Yeats. Thus, to date, there have been at least six biographical studies.²⁹ In the most recent biography, Judith Hill advocates bringing 'her out from behind the shadow of Yeats where, admittedly, she had deliberately put herself'.³⁰ Indeed, Gregory asserted in 1908 – in the midst of the height of her success as a playwright – that she 'went into this theatre for his sake & his interests have been first with me all through'.³¹

From the outset, Gregory has been placed within the context of the Irish Literary Revival and her centrality to the movement turned her into one of the very few women of the period who received critical attention. She noted in early 1902 with pride: 'Coole is said to be the workshop of Ireland'.³² Her home – Coole Park, Co. Galway – became the headquarters for the Revivalists, and the leading literary figures of the day such as Shaw, Yeats, O'Casey

²⁶ Desmond MacCarthy, 'The Irish Plays', *The Speaker* (9 December 1905), p. 252.

²⁷ 'Irish National Theatre', *The Freeman's Journal* (28 December 1904), p. 5, quoted in Robert Hogan and James Kilroy (eds), *Laying the Foundations: 1902-1904, The Modern Irish Drama: A Documentary History II* (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1976), p. 129.

²⁸ Ernest Boyd, *The Contemporary Drama of Ireland* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1919), p. 127.

²⁹ Hazard Adams, *Lady Gregory* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1973); Elizabeth Coxhead, *Lady Gregory: A Literary Portrait*, 2nd ed (1961; London: Secker & Warburg, 1966); Mary Lou Kohfeldt, *Lady Gregory: The Woman Behind the Irish Renaissance* (New York: Atheneum, 1985); Edward A. Kopper, *Lady Isabella Persse Gregory* (Boston: Twayne, 1976). James Pethica is currently working on the authorized biography of Gregory; a two-part project of which the first part will focus on Gregory and Yeats.

³⁰ Judith Hill, *Lady Gregory – An Irish Life* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2005), p. xii.

³¹ Lady Gregory to John Quinn (28 March 1908), Berg.

³² Lady Gregory to Wilfrid Scawen Blunt (30 April 1902), Folder 29, Berg.

and Synge inscribed their initials into the bark of a magnificent copper beech tree; Gregory's own inscription is among them. The Literary Revival attracted attention from its beginning.³³ Both Boyd's *Contemporary Irish Drama* and Ellis-Fermor's *The Irish Dramatic Movement*, for instance, include a chapter on Gregory. One look at the content of survey texts such as Brown's *The Politics of Irish Literature*, Deane's *Celtic Revivals*, and Costello's *The Heart Grown Brutal* indicates the long-lasting focus of Revival studies on its leading male writers with a strong author-centered criticism and a focus on the established canon with Yeats and Joyce predominating.³⁴ The majority of the Revival's writers came from an Anglo-Irish background and thus the movement has been frequently situated within the broader context of Anglo-Irish tradition and thought.³⁵ Gregory figures as an overarching presence, pulling strings in the background and providing the means by which others could be creative. Indeed, in that regard she has been fortunate to have been incorporated into the earlier studies. Other female revivalists, such as Alice Milligan, had to wait much longer to receive critical attention.³⁶

This study is well placed within the contemporary field of Irish drama, as the last decade saw a burgeoning of scholarship on the topic. The works of Lauren Arrington, Ben Levitas, P.J. Mathews and Lionel Pilkington, for instance, present pivotal starting points for

³³ See, for example, Ernest Boyd, *The Contemporary Drama of Ireland* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1919) and *Ireland's Literary Renaissance* (1916; New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1922); Daniel Corkery, *Synge and Anglo-Irish Literature: A Study* (Dublin/Cork: Cork University Press, 1931); Una Ellis-Fermor, *The Irish Dramatic Movement* (1939; London: Methuen & Co., 1967); Denis Gwynn, *Edward Martyn and the Irish Revival* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1930); Andrew Malone, *The Irish Drama* (London: Constable & Co., 1929).

³⁴ Malcolm Brown, *The Politics of Irish Literature – From Thomas Davis to W.B. Yeats* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1973); Seamus Deane, *Celtic Revivals: Essays in Modern Irish Literature, 1880-1980* (London: Faber, 1985); G.J. Watson, *Irish Identity and the Literary Revival* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1994); Peter Costello, *The Heart Grown Brutal: The Irish Revolution in Literature from Parnell to the Death of Yeats, 1891-1939* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan; London: Rowan and Littlefield, 1977). In a special 2003 issue of the *Irish University Review*, new perspectives on the Revival emerged that equally demanded an expanded canon. See Margaret Kelleher, 'Introduction', *Irish University Review* (Spring/Summer 2003), pp. viii-xii.

³⁵ See, for instance, J.C. Beckett, *The Anglo-Irish Tradition* (Belfast: The Blackstaff Press, 1983); W.J. McCormack, *Ascendancy and Tradition in Anglo-Irish Literary History from 1789-1939*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985); Julian Moynahan, *Anglo-Irish – The Literary Imagination in a Hyphenated Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); A. Norman Jeffares, *Anglo-Irish Literature* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1982).

³⁶ Catherine Morris, *Alice Milligan and the Irish Cultural Revival* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2012).

this thesis with their emphasis on the theatre's political and socio-economic context.³⁷ Yet Gregory's role as a playwright remains marginal, mainly considered with regard to her collaboration on *Cathleen ni Houlihan*. Instead, she once more emerges as adviser, skilled defender, administrator and pragmatist of the Abbey Theatre.³⁸ In consideration of this substantial and significant historical contextualization of Irish theatre, it seems right to engage in more detail with the dramatic texts and performances of Gregory's work.

Notably, George Cusack considers a selection of Gregory's plays with regard to identity formation and nation building, focusing on *Spreading the News*, *The Gaol Gate*, *Dervorgilla*, *Cathleen ni Houlihan* and *The Rising of the Moon*.³⁹ Karen Steele presents Gregory in her study on *Women, Press, and Politics During the Revival* 'as a nationalist, a Fenian, an anti-imperialist, and a feminist'.⁴⁰ It is particularly in light of a feminist approach that we see a revived interest in Gregory's plays. Cathy Leeney, for instance, offers an illuminating reading of *The Gaol Gate*, *Kincora*, and *Grania* with regard to the role of 'women in the creation of national discourses, and nationalist culture'.⁴¹ Paul Murphy explores the interlacing of nation, class and gender in *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, *Grania*, *Kincora* and *Dervorgilla*.⁴² These last three plays have been the subject of a substantial number of articles and, therefore, they have been omitted from this study.⁴³ Despite these instances of a

³⁷ Lauren Arrington, *W.B. Yeats, the Abbey Theatre, Censorship, and the Irish State: Adding the Half-Pence to the Pence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Ben Levitas, *The Theatre of Nation: Irish Drama and Cultural Nationalism 1890-1916* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002); P.J. Mathews, *Revival: The Abbey Theatre, Sinn Féin, The Gaelic League and the Cooperative Movement* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2003); Lionel Pilkington, *Theatre and State in 20th Century Ireland: Cultivating the People* (London: Routledge, 2001).

³⁸ For the most detailed in this regard see Lucy McDiarmid, *The Irish Art of Controversy* (Dublin: The Lilliput Press, 2005), pp. 87-122.

³⁹ George Cusack, *The Politics of Identity in Irish Drama* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

⁴⁰ Karen Steele, *Women, Press, and Politics During the Irish Revival* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2007), p. 155.

⁴¹ Cathy Leeney, *Irish Women Playwrights 1900-1939: Gender and Violence on Stage* (New York/Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010), p. 56.

⁴² Paul Murphy, *Hegemony and Fantasy in Irish Drama, 1899-1949* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

⁴³ These have focused largely on aspects of feminism. See Dawn Duncan, 'Lady Gregory and the Feminine Journey: *The Gaol Gate*, *Grania*, and *The Story Brought by Brigit*', *Irish University Review – A Journal of Irish Studies, Special Issue: Lady Gregory*, vol. 34, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2004), pp. 133-143; Marisa Glaser, 'Dethroning the Goddess, Crowning the Woman: Eva Gore-Booth and Augusta Lady Gregory's Mythic Heroines', in Fionnuala Dillane and Ronan Kelly (eds), *New Voices in Irish Criticism 4* (Dublin: Four Courts

continued selective interest in her plays, the only monograph on Gregory the dramatist is Ann Saddlemeyer's *In Defence of Lady Gregory: Playwright*, published in 1966; the title itself is telling.⁴⁴ Although a pioneering work, it stands as a broad survey text that provides many fruitful strands for further discussion, without offering detailed textual analysis. This study aims to address this critical void.

This thesis is inspired by George Watson's *Irish Identity and the Literary Revival*. In exploring the intersection of literature and society, he stresses the importance of a cultural and historical context in considering the works of the Revivalists. Watson focuses on Yeats, Synge, O'Casey and Joyce because – so he argues – they ‘represent the whole complex spectrum of political, social and religious pressures moulding Ireland during the most dramatic years of her transition from an inert ... colony to a new and frequently violent nation’.⁴⁵ This study complements Watson's work in that Gregory, arguably, presents yet another aspect to those pressures. Therefore, Gregory's position as a member of the political elite of Empire, her social status as a landlord, and her orthodox Protestantism provide a themed framework. The resulting pressure of conflicting loyalties has been demonstrated by Colm Tóibín's intriguing biography of Gregory in which he explores skillfully the ambiguity of her ‘two ideologies’ as landlord and nationalist.⁴⁶

In light of the wealth of biographical information available, herein is presented a thematic approach rather than a chronological consideration. As such, the biographical context is provided where necessary as a frame of reference for the dramatic texts. In order to

Press, 2003), pp. 96-104; Karen B. Golightly, ‘Lady Gregory's Deirdre: Self-Censorship or Skilled Editing?’, *New Hibernia Review*, vol. 11, no. 1 (Spring 2007), pp. 117-126; Maureen Hawkins, ‘Ascendancy Nationalism, Feminist Nationalism and Stagecraft in Lady Gregory's Revision of *Kincora*’, in Okifumi Komesu and Masaru Sekine (eds), *Irish Writers and Politics* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Symthe, 1989), pp. 94-108; Maureen Waters, ‘Lady Gregory's *Grania*: A Feminist Voice’, *Irish University Review*, vol. 25, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 1995), pp. 11-24. See also: Anne Fogarty, “‘A Woman of the House’: Gender and Nationalism in the Writings of Augusta Gregory”, in Kathryn Kirkpatrick (ed.), *Border Crossings: Irish Women Writers and National Identities* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2000), pp. 100-122.

⁴⁴ Ann Saddlemeyer, *In Defence of Lady Gregory: Playwright* (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1966).

⁴⁵ G.J. Watson, *Irish Identity and the Literary Revival* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1994), p. 13.

⁴⁶ Colm Tóibín, *Lady Gregory's Toothbrush* (London: Picador, 2003), p. 120.

present a comprehensive textual analysis of Gregory's plays, it is appropriate to be selective. Her playwriting career spanned almost three decades between 1904 and her death in 1932 and an attempt has been made to cover that time period. Based on extensive archival research undertaken at the New York Public Library, the National Library of Ireland and the Bodleian Library, this study addresses the impact of Gregory's attitudes toward the British Empire, religion, and class in her dramatic oeuvre, and reassesses her role as a 'public moralist'.⁴⁷

The project undertaken herein is threefold. Firstly, it establishes the importance of the three themes of Empire, religion and class with regard to Gregory's non-dramatic writing in the 1880s and 1890s in order to outline the continuities and changes in her attitude. Therefore, those plays addressing these key themes have been prioritized. Secondly, a significant part of this study presents a close textual analysis of a representative selection of Gregory's plays. This thesis considers two of her most successful one-act pieces alongside lesser known plays which have received little or no critical attention. Necessarily, in dealing with little known plays, a certain degree of descriptive argument is unavoidable, but an effort has been made to keep this to a minimum. Thirdly, a significant part of the task has been to place the dramatic texts in their historical, political, and bibliographical contexts. In this regard, this thesis is indebted to Yug Mohit Chaudhry's study of *Yeats, The Irish Literary Revival and the Politics of Print* in which he reveals the importance of studying literary texts – and dramatic texts can be included here – in their historical and bibliographical context.⁴⁸ In light of Chaudhry's methodological model, this work draws largely on contemporary periodical and newspaper culture as a means to investigate political debates, ideologies, and reviews pivotal to the respective plays. This information contextualises the dramatic text and, more importantly, the reception of a particular performance. Thus, this study places the

⁴⁷ Stefan Collini, *Public Moralists: Political Thought and Intellectual Life in Britain, 1850-1930* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991).

⁴⁸ Yug Mohit Chaudhry, *Yeats, the Irish Literary Revival and the Politics of Print* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2001).

analysis of printed texts and dramatic performances in the contemporary socio-political contexts in order to contribute to a fuller understanding of the dynamics between play, playwright, and theatre audience. What emerges is a complex exploration and contextualization of Gregory's plays in relation to the Abbey's aesthetics and the playwright's struggle to balance personal allegiances with her cultural projects.

This dissertation is not intended as another literary biography or theatre history or as an addition to the survey-type work which has preceded it, but as a detailed textual analysis of a representative number of Gregory's plays, confined to those which address the themes of Empire, religion and class and for which a substantial amount of manuscript material, contemporary responses, and sources for the production history were available. The act of placing these parameters on the research has meant the exclusion of plays which could equally have been included. Despite the fact that *Spreading the News*, for instance, would have provided a further interesting case study under the theme of Empire, it has been omitted for the simple fact that – contrary to public perception – it does not present Gregory's most staged play. *The Deliverer* and *The Story Brought by Brigit* would have equally constituted examples for Gregory's religious plays.⁴⁹ Whereas the emphasis has hitherto been placed on Gregory's adoption of biblical narratives to apply to Irish history, it is intended here to expand the theme to include her engagement with contested events in Catholic and Protestant narratives of Irish history. Linked to the attempt to recover some of Gregory's lesser known plays, the sole focus has been placed on *The White Cockade* in order to outline the complexity of her dramatic work through a contextualized reading of one preeminent example. With regard to the theme of class, plays such as *The Jackdaw*, *Damer's Gold*, *Dervorgilla*, and *Kincora* could have been equally considered. Appraising a playwright as prolific and varied in genre, approach and themes as Gregory, an exhaustive analysis is

⁴⁹ See, for instance, Abby Bender, 'Lady Gregory's Bible Lessons: "The Deliverer" and "The Story Brought by Brigit"', *Princeton University Library Chronicle*, vol. 68, no. 1-2 (October 2006), pp. 142-162.

beyond the scope of this research as each individual theme could have been easily the topic of any one thesis. What remains is a cross-section of eight plays ranging from the very early years of Gregory's career to her last original play and covering a variety of genres: the comedies *The Rising of the Moon* and *The Wrens*; the tragedy *The Gaol Gate*; the tragic-comedy *The White Cockade*; and the wonder plays *Shanwalla*, *The Jester*, *The Dragon* and *Dave*.

Empire

'We will show that Ireland is not the home of buffoonery and of easy sentiment, as it has been represented', Gregory and Yeats stated in the manifesto for the Irish Literary Theatre in 1897.⁵⁰ Their agenda was to provide a literary counter-image to the Stage Irishman that populated the Victorian music halls, 'the two stock types' of which were 'the hot-headed soldier and the brainless but loyal servant' who were 'depicted as amiable fellows, goodhearted and generous despite their bursts of drinking and pugnacity'. The discrepancies between the literary trope of the Stage Irishman and the reality of the Irish immigrant in England, particularly post-Famine, were exacerbated most prominently in the pages of *Punch*, turning the derogatory yet sympathetic 'harmless drunken peasant' into 'a dangerous anthropoid or simianised agitator'.⁵¹ Following the rise of Fenianism in the 1860s, agrarian agitation during the Land War, and the Phoenix Park murders of Lord Frederick Cavendish and T.H. Burke on 6th May 1882, Irish society became ever more polarised and the Irishman became associated with crime, violence, agrarian disorder and political murder.⁵² Although *Punch* displayed a greater complexity in its representation of the Irish, Foster concludes that

⁵⁰ Lady Augusta Gregory, *Our Irish Theatre: A Chapter of Autobiography* (London/ New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1913), p. 9.

⁵¹ Declan Kiberd, 'The Fall of the Stage Irishman', in Declan Kiberd, *The Irish Writer and the World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 22.

⁵² See L. Perry Curtis Jr., *Apes and Angels: The Irishman in Victorian Caricature* (New York: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1971), pp. 29-57.

‘the attitude was colonial; the Irish were the weaker brethren’. Despite the paper’s support for Home Rule in the 1880s, ‘this could not negate decades of representing one Irish element, the propensity to violence’.⁵³ Therefore, Gregory’s and Yeats’s crusade against ‘buffoonery’ had a political dimension, as the characteristics attributed to the Irish in the British press rendered them as dangerous and incapable of self-government.

British imperial rhetoric depended on analogies of the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon in opposition to the natives to justify the imperial project. Gustave de Molinari, a French economist who reported on the Irish situation in his home country, was quoted in *The Times* in 1880 claiming that the English were ‘treating the Irish as an inferior race – as a kind of white negroes – and a glance at *Punch* is sufficient to show the difference they establish between the plump and robust personification of John Bull and the wretched figure of lean and bony Pat’.⁵⁴ Britain’s neighbour was difficult to integrate into the Darwinian racial discourse applied in the imperial context as skin colour was no marker of difference between the British and Irish. Anne McClintock outlines that ‘*domestic degeneracy*’ functioned more conveniently as a concept for racial difference. In reference to a cartoon by Frederick B. Oppen in *Puck* of February 1882 (Figure 3), the Irishman is depicted

lazing in front of his hovel – the very picture of domestic disarray. The house is out of kilter, the shutter is askew. He lounges cheerily on an upturned wash-basin, visible proof of a slovenly lack of dedication to domestic order. What appears to be a cooking pot perches on his head. In the doorway, the boundary between private and public, his wife displays an equally cheerful slothfulness. In both husband and wife, the absence of skin color as a marker of degeneration is compensated for by the simianizing of their physiognomies: exaggerated lips, receding foreheads, unkempt hair and so on.

The cartoon’s title of ‘The King of A Shantee’, McClintock suggests, provided a comparison between the Irish and Africans.⁵⁵ Oppen’s caricature, in addition to the stereotype of the lazy

⁵³ R.F. Foster, ‘Paddy and Mr Punch’, in R. F. Foster, *Paddy and Mr Punch – Connections in Irish and English History* (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1995), p. 193.

⁵⁴ ‘A French View of Irish Affairs’, *The Times* (18 September 1880), p. 6.

⁵⁵ Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (London/New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 53.

and simian Irishman described above, featured subtle hints of alcohol, smoking and violence. Rolling behind the upturned wash-basin is an empty bottle, readily to be associated with Irish drunkenness. The apparently relaxed sitting-position of the pipe-smoking Irishman bears an underlying tension at odds with McClintock's assumption of cheerfulness. A cudgel, tucked under his right arm, implies a readiness for violent outbreak that appears almost to be anticipated by the wide open eyes. Here, the Irishman is portrayed as a rebellious drunkard, always on the verge of committing a crime.

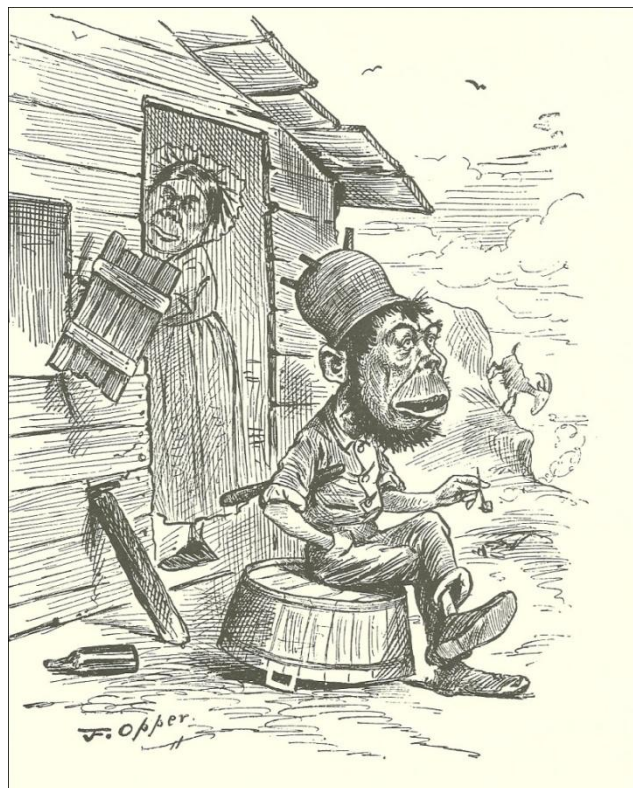


Figure 3 Frederick B. Opper, 'The King of A Shantee'

15 February 1882, *Puck*, vol. 10, p. 378.

This theme of image and representation is addressed in one of Gregory's most well-known and popular one-act comedies, *Spreading the News*, staged at the opening of the Abbey Theatre in December 1904. In her portrayal of Bartley Fallon and his neighbours and friends in the village of Cloon, the audience is presented with a community somewhat akin to

Opper's 'King of A Shantee'. In this plot in which gossip reigns supreme, the Irishman's proclivity to mythmaking in the form of an accelerated rumour that incorporates adultery and murder is at once an exposé and parody of the stereotype, but also a critique.⁵⁶ With regard to another of Gregory's plays, *The Stage* commented:

If Lady Gregory [...] gives a true portraiture of the Connaught peasant there must be profound observation at the base of Mr. George Moore's recent dictum that the Irish are not really humorous, but merely loquacious. Never, perhaps, on the stage did fine people talk so and to so little purpose. One could hardly see the fruit for leaves.⁵⁷

If we follow through with that perception, the Irish are perceived as admirable and entertaining companions, but they merely talk, rather than act. Henceforth, one could venture to suspect that Gregory is expressing their inability for political action or active participation.

Critics have suggested that such a portrayal of the Irish is linked to imperial power structures. James Pethica asserts that Gregory exposes 'their inability to assert themselves politically'.⁵⁸ Scott Boltwood argues that, in Gregory's work, 'English authority chillingly reappears as an embodiment of blind power alienated from justice: ignorant, capricious, dominating'. Thus, he concludes, whilst she empathises with the Irish, 'the Anglo-Irish are absent from Gregory's farcical world, and accordingly the peasantry cannot respond to their oppression because they lack the leadership provided by the aristocracy'.⁵⁹ However, as Chapter One demonstrates, Gregory's engagement with the theme of imperial jurisprudence does not leave the Irish paralysed by foreign law as is the case in *Spreading the News*. As a close reading of *The Rising of the Moon* and *The Gaol Gate* demonstrates, Gregory presents the Irish as quite capable of subverting British law as applied in Ireland. However, despite both plays' positive reception among nationalist audiences, Gregory's underlying

⁵⁶ On Gregory's characters as representatives of the Lover/Lever tradition see Andrew Malone, 'The Plays of Lady Gregory', *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, vol. 13, no. 50 (June 1924), pp. 247-258.

⁵⁷ W.J. Lawrence, 'Irish Productions', *The Stage* (28 November 1912), p. 25.

⁵⁸ James Pethica, 'Lady Gregory's Abbey Theatre drama', p. 71.

⁵⁹ Scott Boltwood, "'I Kept Silence For Good or Evil": Lady Gregory's Cloon Plays and Home Rule', in Scott Boltwood (ed.), *Renegotiating and Resisting Nationalism in Twentieth-Century Irish Drama* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 2009), pp. 42, 43.

consideration of the effects of self-sacrificial nationalism attest to her continuous interrogation of the ideologies of imperialism as well as nationalism. *The Wrens* offers an exploration of the impact of legislative politics on everyday life with its historical focus on the passage of the Act of Union.

Religion

Associated to the theme of Empire is the theme of religion. As Len Platt outlines in *Joyce and the Anglo-Irish*, revivalism

emerged from a Protestant intelligentsia, and from Protestant institutions. These self-appointed guardians of the national culture were not attempting to construct a Catholic Ireland. On the contrary, they were attempting to preserve an Ascendancy Ireland, where traditional, feudal relations could be preserved from the onslaught of an alien modernity. This was the Protestant tradition of revivalism that was developed by Petrie, O'Curry, O'Donovan and, more radically, Samuel Ferguson and Standish O'Grady. It found its greatest champion in Yeats and his Literary Revival, and it was the literary culture which, until Joyce's intervention, held the most serious claim to be articulating not just the voice of Ireland but its very consciousness.

Platt concludes, 'Revivalism was crucially a Protestant Anglo-Irish culture and [...] it was understood as such by Joyce'. The Revival is thus perceived by both Joyce and his critic as 'the continuance of an old establishment'.⁶⁰ This creates a dichotomy between Anglo-Ireland, represented by the Revivalists, and Irish-Ireland, represented by D.P. Moran and his publication of *The Leader*, as explored by Willard Potts in his study of *Joyce and the Two Irelands*. In his opening chapter 'Sectarianism and the Irish Revival', Potts gives a detailed outline of the relations between the 'two Irelands', referred to most commonly as 'Catholic and Protestant'. Consequently, he argues, 'friction between the groups regularly is called "sectarian," even when religion is not the cause'.⁶¹ This is as far as Potts goes with regard to defining sectarianism. If sectarianism is understood as the 'excessive attachment or undue

⁶⁰ Len Platt, *Joyce and the Anglo-Irish: A Study of Joyce and the Literary Revival* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998), pp. 12, 13.

⁶¹ Willard Potts, *Joyce and the Two Irelands* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000), p. 1.

favouring' of a particular religious group, this indicates an active component.⁶² Sectarianism, hence, is not simply a preference for one religion, but rather an active discrimination against another religious group. Whereas Colm Tóibín excuses Gregory's famous 'toothbrush-comment' as a *faux-pas* of snobbishness, Potts argues for a sectarian element to Gregory's writing and character.⁶³

Potts suggests that 'By the simple technique of populating their plays only with Catholics, Yeats, Synge, and Lady Gregory avoided the whole question of the relationship between the two cultures. Protestants writing plays in which no Protestants appear resulted in a theatre movement beset by sectarian friction to which it makes no reference'.⁶⁴ Chapter Two considers Pott's claim in relation to Gregory's historical play *The White Cockade*. It is not only its overt reference to Jacobitism and the recent commemoration of the rebellion of the United Irishmen that is of interest here, but also Gregory's choice of topic. With the Battle of the Boyne, she directly addressed the relationship between Protestants and Catholics as this pivotal event in Irish history crashed Catholic hopes to reassert their rights. The play's tremendously positive reception among Irish Catholics – most potently expressed in the pages of *The Leader* – complicates Potts' argument.

Class

The Irish Literary Theatre – in its administrative organisation – was largely an upper-class endeavour; Yeats was from a middle-class family; Martyn and Moore were landowners; Gregory was the widow of a former colonial governor who functioned as the custodian of her son's heritage. The theatre, in its initial stages, depended largely on Gregory's contacts

⁶² 'sectarianism, n.'. OED Online. June 2013. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.liv.ac.uk/view/Entry/174584?redirectedFrom=sectarianism&>. Accessed 17 June 2013).

⁶³ Tóibín, *Lady Gregory's Toothbrush*.

⁶⁴ Potts, *Joyce and the Two Irelands*, p. 19.

among the Irish and English elite circles whose political allegiances differed from her own.

As Mary Colum notes appreciatively:

In dealing with Unionist loyalists and persons of recent English descent, the famous tact might have been of some help. But I think it was not so much the tact as her honesty of purpose, her single-mindedness, her hard disinterested labour for what she believed in, that kept for her her friendship of so many people in England and Ireland who were inimical to Irish nationalism.⁶⁵

This, however, was not always an easy venture. When Queen Victoria was due to visit Dublin in 1900, Yeats and Moore published letters of opposition in the Irish press, leading to the alienation of some of the theatre's subscribers. Yeats wrote a letter of consolation to Gregory in which he suggests that 'In a battle like Ireland's, which is one of poverty against wealth, one must prove one's sincerity by making oneself unpopular to wealth. One must accept the baptism of the gutter'. Gregory's response illustrates the tension and gives voice to her disdain: 'I answered that I preferred the baptism of clean water. I was troubled by the misunderstanding of friends'.⁶⁶ Considering the early theatre's unionist and ascendancy support, Frazier argues, Yeats's 'Queen letters' were a deliberate manoeuvre to turn his back on that class in order to gain 'credibility with the nationalist audience'.⁶⁷ For Gregory, however, this was also a personal issue tied to her wish and need to safeguard her status among that same class; the theatre's *modus operandi* and its associated participation in public debates directly impacted on her personal life, further complicating questions of loyalty. With a focus on plays that engage with cross-class plotlines, particularly those incorporating the theme of disguise, Chapter Three seeks to demonstrate the continuity of Gregory's elitism in *Shanwalla*, *The Dragon*, *The Jester*, and *Dave*. The underlying debate between eugenic versus environmental building of character offers hitherto unexplored connections between Gregory's and Yeats's dramatic work.

⁶⁵ Mary Colum, *Life and the Dream* (Dublin: The Dolmen Press, 1966), p. 110.

⁶⁶ Gregory, *Our Irish Theatre*, p. 71. The passage also appears in William Butler Yeats, *Autobiographies*, ed. William H. O'Donnell and Douglas N. Archibald (New York: Scribner, 1999), p. 410.

⁶⁷ Frazier, *Behind the Scenes*, p. 30.

In 1924, *The Manchester Guardian* featured an article on ‘Lady Gregory’ with the following comment:

Lady Gregory, in her work the most plainly realistic of the three and the most directly creating in terms of the stage, has, nevertheless, remained to the outside world the most shadowy figure of a movement that has become, rightly or wrongly, synonymous with shadows and twilight. [...] Lady Gregory alone has worked steadily through the years as an Abbey Theatre dramatist, adding to her fame neither by accident nor any complementary exercise of her gifts. [...] Her relative obscurity [to people unfamiliar with the Dublin story] is due to the nature of things and not at all to any ungenerousness on the part of her fellow-workers. Mr. Yeats himself has never failed in acknowledgement of the rare quality of her work and of all that it has meant to the movement of which he is now commonly accounted the leader. There will come a time, it may be coming now, when the so-called Celtic revival will be overtaken by the reaction that sets in against all vigorous and original art, and in the period of neglect nothing is likely to be remembered of its older masters but a few lyrics by Mr. Yeats. But when the movement is rediscovered, its work in the theatre will be distinguished by the plays of Lady Gregory as surely as by anything that it produced.⁶⁸

Although Gregory’s plays still await their revival, the time has come to shine the spotlight on this ‘shadowy figure’ in her role as playwright.

⁶⁸ ‘J.D.’, ‘Lady Gregory’, *The Manchester Guardian* (18 November 1924), p.7.

I

‘What justice is there in the world at all?’:

Legacies of Empire

I am not working for home rule, but preparing for it.

- Lady Gregory, 1901¹

Just now ... I seem possessed with the passion for Ireland, for my country. ... If this truce should come to an end, the bitter war begin again, I wish to put myself on the side of the people, I wish to go to prison, I think even to execution (tho' I will not take a life – yet one may attain to this by 'comforting the King's enemies').

- Lady Gregory, 1921²

Kate O'Brien noted in *My Ireland* that the 'The Gregorys [were] Colonial servants of England'.³ Despite this immersion in imperial society, Gregory's attitude to the Empire changed over the course of her life. This is illustrated by her comment, upon reading Edward Dicey's *England and Egypt* in October 1881, that '[h]is aim is to prove that England for her own sake & the sake of Egypt & its inhabitants ought to occupy it without delay'. 'He proves this to my satisfaction', she added, 'but as I was convinced before I began his book that is hardly a high compliment!'⁴ Dicey's account proved a timely publication in 1881 when the Gregorys were journeying eastward that winter.⁵ Her support for Britain's imperial project was in keeping with her immersion in the culture of colonial administration which she had entered through her marriage to Sir William, who had been knighted in 1875 for his

¹ Lady Gregory to Wilfrid Scawen Blunt (23 December 1901), Folder 25, Lady Gregory collection of papers, 1873-[1965] bulk (1873-1932). The Berg Collection of English and American Literature, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations, New York City. Hereafter cited as Berg.

² Entry for 20 July 1921, Holograph Journal Vol. 8 quoted in James Pethica, "'Our Kathleen": Yeats's Collaboration with Lady Gregory in the Writing of *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*', in Deirdre Toomey (ed.), *Yeats and Women* (London: Macmillan, 1997), p. 216.

³ Kate O'Brien, *My Ireland* (London: B.T. Batsford Ltd., 1962), p. 47. Equally, R.F. Foster remarked that 'Coole was an imperial house, memorializing generations of service to the Empire'. R.F. Foster, *Paddy and Mr Punch – Connections in Irish and English History* (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1995), p. 224.

⁴ Entry for 2 October [1881], 'Excerpts from her reading', Berg.

⁵ See Edward Dicey, *England and Egypt* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1881).

successful Governorship of Ceylon.⁶ Her experience of socialising among the ruling elite as well as her engagement with native populations in Britain's overseas colonies exposed her to the opposing discourses of imperialist and nationalist rhetoric, prompting a gradual shift in her attitude toward imperial policy. This is evidenced by a retrospective comment in the margins of her reading notes on Dicey: 'My salad days – When I was green in judgment!'⁷ Suggestive of a significant evolution in her political thought, Egypt proved to be Gregory's 'education in politics'; an epiphany that caused her to question Britain's imperial project.⁸ Her championing of the Egyptian nationalist leader Arabi Bey has been acknowledged as a decisive moment in her gradual movement toward Irish nationalism, as it displayed her sympathy for and support of a native people on the brink of British occupation in the early 1880s.⁹ However, Gregory's attitude fluctuated.

On their arrival in Cairo in November 1881, the Gregorys 'tumbled into a revolution' and Gregory 'felt the real excitement of politics'.¹⁰ In September, the Egyptian nationalist Arabi Bey had led a rebellion, placing Egypt on the brink of British occupation. In justification of imperial policy, Lord Cromer, Consul in Egypt from 1883 to 1907, focused on 'what was the chaotic material out of which the Englishman had to evolve something like order'.¹¹ Such rhetoric presented imperial stereotypes in the framework of the dichotomy of the civilised Englishman versus the wild Egyptian:

⁶ Sir William served as Governor of Ceylon from 1872 to 1877. For an account of his Governorship see Brian Jenkins, *Sir William Gregory of Coole: The Biography of an Anglo-Irishman* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1986), pp. 218-254.

⁷ Entry for 2 October [1881], 'Excerpts from her reading', Berg. Her retrospective comment is undated.

⁸ She dedicated one chapter of her autobiography *Seventy Years* to her Egyptian experience, titled 'Education in Politics: Egypt'. See Lady Gregory, *Seventy Years*, ed. by Colin Smythe (New York: Macmillan, 1974), pp. 33-55.

⁹ Declan Kiberd, for instance, argues that it 'opened her mind to the powers of cultural nationalism'. Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation* (London: Vintage, 1996), p. 86. Christopher Murray asserts that 'Gregory was at least as much an opponent of colonialism as was Yeats, and from an earlier date'. Christopher Murray, *Twentieth-Century Irish Drama: Mirror Up To Nation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), p. 41.

¹⁰ Gregory, *Seventy Years*, p. 34.

¹¹ Earl of Cromer, *Modern Egypt, In Two Volumes, Volume Two* (New York: Macmillan, 1908), p. 126. Cromer was Consul in Egypt from 1883 to 1907.

There lie those nine or ten million native Egyptians at the bottom of the social ladder, a poor, ignorant, credulous, but withal not unkindly race, being such as sixty centuries of misgovernment and oppression by various rulers, from Pharaohs to Pashas, have made them. It is for the civilised Englishman to extend to them the hand of fellowship and encouragement, and to raise them, morally and materially, from the abject state in which he finds them. [...] [The Englishman] looks towards India, and he says to himself, with all the confidence of an imperial race, I can perform this task; I have done it before now.

Most importantly, Lord Cromer outlined that one crucial goal of the reforms was to ‘have justice in [the Egyptian fellaheen’s] law-courts’.¹² By implication, the Englishman had a superior moral mind-set more suitable to distinguish right from wrong. It is specifically in the context of justice and judicial procedures that Gregory began to interrogate the concept of Empire. Firstly, she realized the potential of writing in the public domain to influence opinion. Secondly, she became aware of the direct link between public opinion and judicial practice.

In the case of Arabi Bey, one key concern was the apparent ignorance among both the British ruling elite and general public regarding the situation in Egypt, and the representation of the Egyptian nationalist leader in particular. Wilfrid Scawen Blunt admitted in his *Secret History* that he was initially suspicious of the Egyptian nationalist movement and its objectives. ‘The reason for my blindness and indifference’, he wrote, ‘was that in England the events of September [1881] had been represented in the Press as purely military’.¹³ Blunt’s and the Gregorys’ incentive became to educate and inform the British public and to provide a counter-image to the negative portrayals of Arabi Bey who was described in *The Times* as ‘a simple fellah, of very small intelligence’.¹⁴

After securing the assistance of his friend Thomas Chenery, an Arabic scholar and editor of *The Times*, Sir William joined Blunt’s campaign on Bey’s behalf ‘to set public

¹² Cromer, *Modern Egypt, Volume Two*, p. 130.

¹³ Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, *Secret History of the English occupation of Egypt being a personal narrative of events* (1907; New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1922), p. 120.

¹⁴ ‘The Crisis in Egypt’, *The Times* (4 July 1882), p. 5.

opinion right there'.¹⁵ Having returned to London in the spring of 1882, Lady Gregory wrote to Blunt in the aftermath of the bombardment of Alexandria (11th July): 'I am not unhappy about Egypt but about Arabi'.¹⁶ Blunt grudgingly noted in his diary that, as '[h]is popularity is very dear to him', 'Sir William has ratted'.¹⁷ Gregory, however, 'remained more staunch' and took to her pen in late July 1882 in support of the pro-Egyptian campaign.¹⁸ She finished her essay on 'Arabi and his Household' in August.¹⁹ The title is in keeping with her previous comment that her primary loyalty was to the Egyptian rather than his country.

Arabi Bey, arrested and imprisoned in the aftermath of the massacre of Alexandria and the war of Tel-el-Kebir, was accused by the British Government and in the press of treason and deemed responsible for the crisis that resulted in British occupation.²⁰ Once the war in Egypt had ended, the battle continued in the press, memoirs and political pamphlets, both sides making substantial efforts to justify their actions, and '[t]he image of Arabi was the prize fought over'.²¹ Lord Cromer retrospectively asserted that '[t]here could be no doubt that [...] [Arabi] had been guilty' and that '[h]ad he been tried by Courtmartial and shot

¹⁵ Entry for 25 February 1882, Diary, Typescript Parts 1-3, p. 8, Berg. For Sir William's letters see *The Times*, (21 December 1881), p. 8; (10 January 1882), p. 10; (14 February 1882), p. 4; (16 March 1882), p. 12; (12 April 1882), p. 4; (29 June 1882), p. 7; (30 September 1882), p. 6; (2 December 1882), p. 10. For Blunt's letters see *The Times*, (3 February 1882), p. 3; (7 February 1882), p. 3; (20 February 1882), p. 8; (31 March 1882), p. 4; (5 April 1882), p. 8; (24 April 1882), p. 5, 6; (1 July 1882), p. 10; (13 October 1882), p. 5; (27 November 1882), p. 8; (5 December 1882), p. 6. On Blunt's account of the manipulation of the press see Blunt, *Secret History*, pp. 133-134.

¹⁶ Lady Gregory to Wilfrid Scawen Blunt (24 July 1882), Folder 1, Berg.

¹⁷ Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, [undated entry]; Entry for 19 May 1882, Holograph Diary quoted in James Pethica, 'A Dialogue of Self and Service: Lady Gregory's Emergence as an Irish Writer and Partnership with W.B. Yeats' (unpublished D.Phil., University of Oxford, 1987), pp. 37, 36.

¹⁸ Blunt, *Secret History*, p. 242; Lady Gregory to Wilfrid Scawen Blunt (24 July 1882), Folder 1, Berg. Blunt notes as early as late June that she 'has written a paper on the Control in Egypt, which is amusing'. No copy of this article has been found. See Blunt, *Secret History*, p. 273.

¹⁹ Lady Gregory to Wilfrid Scawen Blunt (29 August 1882), Folder 1, Berg. Sir William Gregory supported the publication initially, changed his mind after Arabi's surrender to the British, but ultimately agreed in the likelihood of execution. See Lucy McDiarmid, 'The Demotic Lady Gregory', in Maria DiBattista and Lucy McDiarmid (eds), *High and Low Moderns: Literature and Culture 1889-1939* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 231.

²⁰ Weigall, *A History of Events in Egypt*, p. 203.

²¹ Joseph Lennon, *Irish Orientalism: A Literary and Intellectual History* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2004), p. 229. Weigall, for instance, portrayed Arabi as an 'ignorant mind'. See Weigall, *A History of Events in Egypt*, p. 127.

directly after he was taken prisoner, no injustice would have been done' to Bey.²² Yet he raised concerns about 'whether it was wise to elevate him to the rank of a martyr', particularly as 'he was regarded by some few Englishmen as a hero'.²³ Yet the probability of Arabi's execution was, Lord Cromer acknowledged, inextricably linked to the attitudes of the populace: 'British public opinion condemned the execution of prisoners for political offences, and the British Government would naturally follow public opinion on a point of this sort'.²⁴ Bey's trial was thus not only a question of justice as applied by the British Government, but also dependent on public opinion.

The significance of public opinion was not lost on Gregory: 'I cant help dreading a little the news from Egypt now our troops must have landed', she wrote to Blunt, conscious of her own conflicting attitudes, 'but we must only say, God defend the right! I hope that is not treason'.²⁵ Despite her identification with the British imperial elite, the comment demonstrates her increasing ambivalence toward imperialism, particularly in regard to judicial procedures and abuse of power. In September, Gregory was privately admitting her doubts concerning the integrity of the British government: '[t]here is not much chance that Arabi will have a fair trial'.²⁶ In this context, Gregory's article on 'Arabi and his Household' proved to be a potent political tool.²⁷ It was published in *The Times* two days after she had noted in her diary that '[Abraham] Hayward has had a letter from Gladstone in which he

²² Earl of Cromer, *Modern Egypt, In Two Volumes, Volume One* (London: Macmillan, 1908), p. 334.

²³ Cromer, *Modern Egypt, Volume One*, p. 334. Among those 'few Englishmen', it can be assumed, Lord Cromer nodded towards Sir William and Blunt. The latter had just published his anti-imperial pamphlet *Atrocities of Justice Under British Rule in Egypt* (London: T.F. Unwin, 1906) and the *Secret History* (1907).

²⁴ Cromer, *Modern Egypt, Volume One*, p. 335.

²⁵ Lady Gregory to Wilfrid Scawen Blunt (11 August 1882), Folder 1, Berg. Note the similarity to the Ulster Covenant, signed in 1912 in opposition of Home Rule: 'In sure confidence that God will defend the right we hereto subscribe our names', quoted in Donal Lowry, 'Ulster resistance and loyalist rebellion in the Empire', in Keith Jeffrey (ed.), *'An Irish Empire'? Aspects of Ireland and the British Empire* (Manchester/New York: Manchester University Press, 1996), p. 201.

²⁶ Lady Gregory to Wilfrid Scawen Blunt (17 September 1882), Folder 1, Berg.

²⁷ Lady Gregory, 'Arabi and his Household', *The Times* (23 October 1882), p. 4. On 25 October, Lady Gregory took her article to Kegan Paul who published it as a pamphlet. See Entry for 25 October 1882, Diary, Typescript Parts 1-3, p. 19, Berg. Notably, Gregory's article was approvingly quoted at length in the Irish nationalist press: 'Lady Gregory warmly defends Arabi from the charges of cruelty and cowardice'. 'Arabi and his Household', *The Nation* (4 November 1882), p. 6.

mentions the “possible necessity” of putting Arabi to death’.²⁸ While ‘In September he had been branded a rebel, [...] in October he became the object of increasing sympathy outside Egypt’, Galbraith demonstrates. ‘Of great importance’, he asserts, ‘was the editorial position of *The Times*, and that position was affected by the efforts of a small group of sympathisers with Arabi, notably Sir William and Lady Gregory’.²⁹

This political piece launched her career as a writer and it was designed to provide the public with a counter-image of the alleged ‘bloodthirsty despot’ in the British press. Rather than focussing on Arabi’s political motives and nationalist ideology, Gregory concentrated on character and domestic setting in order ‘to interest Englishmen in this family – simple, honest, hospitable, as I found them, and who are now poor, hunted, in danger’. It is a description that could be equally applicable to the Irish country people she would later visit in cottages and workhouses.³⁰ The domestic theme, however, did not impede on the political intention of the article which focused on three themes. Firstly, she acknowledged the importance of the public image of an individual in the context of imperial stereotypes. Secondly, she realized the damaging effects of rumours and false representation in their effects on judicial procedures. Thirdly, she observed the effects of politics at an individual rather than a national level. In consequence, Gregory’s defence of Arabi’s reputation stands as a critical engagement with British imperialism.

Gregory focused on Arabi as husband, son and father, a hero admired by his people and respected by his colleagues, both from the Egyptian and English side. She juxtaposed the public image, nurtured by photographs, with her own personal experience. Authenticity was a key concern of the article that corresponded with Blunt’s later accusation that Britain’s imperial elite lacked knowledge of local customs and people. He proclaimed that Lord

²⁸ Entry for 21 October 1882, Diary, Typescript Parts 1-3, p. 19, Berg. See also William Gladstone to Lord Granville (21 September 1882), quoted in Galbraith, ‘The Trial of Arabi Pasha’, p. 276.

²⁹ Galbraith, ‘The Trial of Arabi Pasha’, pp. 280, 278.

³⁰ Gregory, ‘Arabi’, p. 4.

Cromer was ‘shut up in his office and seeing practically nothing of native Egypt beyond the tame officials whom he had attracted to his camp’.³¹ In contrast, Gregory presented herself as someone with a more erudite judgment of the matter. Yet her admission of being unable to speak the native language, for instance, emphasises her position as an outsider who can, ultimately, only provide a limited representation. Rather than concealing aspects of Arabi’s character as represented by British imperial rhetoric, she offered contrasting features to negate one-dimensional narratives. Acknowledging that the ‘sternness’ reproduced in photographs led to ‘the ready belief’ of his ‘bloodthirstiness’, she emphasised Arabi’s ‘very pleasant’ smile. Despite Arabi’s Egyptian uniform, including the sword that according to her could ‘rival those of Excalibur’, she claimed to ‘believe him to be exceedingly gentle and humane’.³² Her selective editing is most apparent in regard to her portrayal of Arabi’s wife. Gregory deliberately eliminated information she considered to be of disadvantage to his image: ‘be it said Arabi has been divorced twice & his wife once which I have not mentioned in my article!’³³ Set to provide the public with an honest, respectable and trustworthy image of Arabi Bey, she was fashioning her account to meet that political end.

Although initially recorded simply as ‘recollections’ with no intent of publication, she confessed to her readers that:

news has reached me from Cairo that Arabi’s wife has had to find a refuge with a high-minded Princess, who has always been known as one who loved Egypt, and that that Princess is consequently in danger of arrest; that Arabi’s mother is hidden in a poor quarter of the town, afraid to face the vengeance of his enemies now in power.

³¹ Blunt, *My Diaries, Part One*, p. 45.

³² Gregory, ‘Arabi’, p. 4. For a detailed account of Gregory’s demilitarised portrayal of Arabi see Andrea Bobotis, ‘From Egypt to Ireland: Lady Augusta Gregory and Cross-Cultural Nationalisms in Victorian Ireland’, *Romanticism and Victorianism on the Net*, no. 48 (November 2007), pp. 11, 12. <http://www.erudit.org/revue/ravon/2007/v/n48/017439ar.html>. Accessed 17.11.2011.

³³ Lady Gregory to Wilfrid Scawen Blunt (29 August 1882), Folder 1, Berg. Gregory took note of this in her diary: ‘She is his third and only reigning wife. [...] The last wife, she says, had nothing to recommend her but that she was big and far “just a good bit of meat”!’ See Entry for 26 February 1882, Diary, Typescript Parts 1-3, p. 9, Berg.

There is no mention of the trial or the allegations made. Instead, she is eager to interest the British public in the individual case of Arabi and his family and the hardship and fears they had to suffer in consequence of political action. The portrayal of Arabi's mother demanded a particular emotional response as she is quoted to have said "until he comes I cannot sleep, I cannot rest; I can do nothing but pray for him all the time". Thereby, Gregory tests the political ideologies of imperialism and nationalism with regard to their impact on domestic life.

'Arabi and his Household', as Gregory proudly noted in her autobiography, 'really was a success', and she had been told by her husband and his friends that she was the very subject of London table talk.³⁴ Becoming what Stefan Collini terms a 'public moralist', she was able to turn the public sympathetic towards Arabi Bey.³⁵ While Prime Minister William Gladstone thought it a "very touching" letter, the politician Hugh Oakeley Arnold Forster 'told me my letter had produced a strong reaction in favour of Arabi'.³⁶ Sir William returned from the Athenaeum Club in December with the news that Arabi was 'released on parole' and, attending the opening of the Law Courts, 'All congratulated us on Arabi's acquittal'.³⁷ Thereby, their support was acknowledged and directly related to the outcome of the trial. By spring 1884, Gregory outlined her 'programme' of 'Egypt for the Egyptians' to Lord Wemyss, which is suggestive of a continuous support for the Egyptian nationalist movement.³⁸ However, by the end of that year, being 'complimented [...] on my sympathy with Egypt which showed a great humanity – as I have no personal interest there', she

³⁴ Gregory, *Seventy Years*, p. 46.

³⁵ See Stefan Collini, *Public Moralists: Political Thought and Intellectual Life in Britain, 1850-1930* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991).

³⁶ Entry for 29 October 1882, p. 19; Entry for 8 November 1882, p. 21, Diary, Typescript Parts 1-3 [envelope], Berg.

³⁷ Entry for 3 December 1882; Entry for 4 December 1882, p. 23, Diary, Typescript Parts 1-3 [envelope], Berg.

³⁸ Entry for 12 February 1884; Entry for 4 December 1882, Diary, Typescript Parts 1-3 [envelope], pp. 23, 34 Berg.

repeated that ‘I had a personal interest in Arabi!’³⁹ This complicates our understanding of ‘Arabi and his Household’ as the origin of Gregory’s sympathy for oppressed nations, which was later applied to the Irish context.⁴⁰ However, she was not ready to draw that comparison.

Blunt, rather begrudgingly, wrote in his 1886 diary that:

It is curious that she, who could see so clearly in Egypt [...] should be blind now that the case is between English landlords and Irish tenants in Galway. But property blinds all eyes, and it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle, than for an Irish landlord to enter into the kingdom of Home Rule.⁴¹

Travelling ‘full of interest’ through India in the winter of 1885 to 1886, Gregory was provided with a first-hand experience of a British colony.⁴² Following their arrival in December, they ‘were passed on with a good word from one hospitable official hand to another through the three Presidencies’, including the Viceroy Lord Dufferin in Bombay and the Governor Grant Duff in Madras.⁴³ Disappointed by the rather one-dimensional encounter, she reported home: ‘I feel already that we shall see very little of India from Govt houses, one is surrounded by [...] sunburnt officials & officers with fair moustaches whose ideas on all subjects are as much alike as the cut of their hair’.⁴⁴ Despite the touristic sight-seeing of temples, mosques and caves, the Gregorys travelled exuberantly with horses, escorts and ‘mounted Police’, sleeping ‘in sumptuous tents’ with one furnished to function as a banqueting hall. Yet between opulent picnics and dinner parties amongst the ruling elite, she did not fail to discern that ‘we travellers see only the rosy side and the luxurious living of the Civil Servants, but that the other side is to be seen when in some lonely station you come upon a little grave where some official has buried his child who died for want of a doctor’s

³⁹ Entry for 8 October 1884, Diary, Typescript, Part 2, 16 Jan 1884 – 1 Dec 1885, Typescript (original), unsigned, 69 p. (most p mutilated), p. 34, Berg.

⁴⁰ See, for instance, Sinéad Garrigan Mattar, *Primitivism, Science, and the Irish Revival* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), p. 205.

⁴¹ Entry for 10 June 1886 in Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, *The Land War in Ireland – Being a Personal Narrative of Events, In Continuation of “A Secret History of the English Occupation of Egypt”* (London: Stephen Swift, MCMXII), p. 146.

⁴² Lady Gregory, ‘Our Boys in India’, Typescript of essay with author’s ms. corrections, p. 1, Berg.

⁴³ Gregory, ‘Our Boys in India’, p. 1, Berg.

⁴⁴ Lady Gregory to Wilfrid Scawen Blunt (3 December 1885), Folder 13, Berg.

help'.⁴⁵ Saddened by the colony's isolation with its absence of sufficient medical care, she bemoaned the losses of 'officials' rather than the equal hardships of the native population. However, Gregory took pity on a boy of twelve she met on a visit to a local prison where he had been jailed in the course of the latest famine, and offered the necessary payment for the foster care.⁴⁶ In recognizing the discrepancy between rich and poor, a vein of guilt and conscious blindness resonated when she wrote: 'The general formula when we sit down to a meal is that we are not to think, like Mr. Blunt, that our hosts live like this every day, it is only for guests the "imported delicacies" are opened!'⁴⁷

As a member of the imperial elite she appeared apologetic, but was aware of the advantages as well as disadvantages of the British Empire for both rulers and ruled. In India, Gregory observed imperial society perhaps even more consciously as she was asked by Paul Harvey, a young orphan at Rugby School taken under the patronage of Henry James and the Gregorys, to inquire into the life and work of the civil service as a possible career. She had agreed to provide him with the essential information, desiring a successful future for her young protégée. Thus, her attitude toward Empire was complex as it offered a prestigious and profitable career that could be equally beneficial, if executed in a respectable and responsible manner, for both colonizer and colonized.

Gregory's conflicting attitude manifested itself most prominently in an unpublished essay entitled 'Our Boys in India', presumably written on her return from India in spring 1886, and an illuminating companion piece to 'Arabi and His Household'. Written to note the advantages and disadvantages of a career in the civil service for Harvey, she was alert to the limitations of her account as she only 'tread on the roses and lay on the lilies of Indian life' which, she confessed, 'was the brighter side [...] as we rapidly passed by'. Despite the

⁴⁵ Gregory, *Seventy Years*, p. 219.

⁴⁶ Mary Lou Kohfeldt, *Lady Gregory: The Woman Behind the Irish Renaissance* (New York: Atheneum, 1985), p. 74.

⁴⁷ Gregory, *Seventy Years*, p. 216.

declared impediment of her account, she was impressed ‘by what a little handful of Englishmen the great Empire is governed’. Reflecting on her visit to Bijapoor, a town in the presidency of Bombay, she complimented the peacefulness of the district in which British officials walked around ‘unarmed and unprotected’ and ‘ruled with unquestioned authority’. The latter, she proposed, was ‘due to the belief in the Englishman’s uprightness and honour’, a comment that stands at odds with Gregory’s experience of British judicial policy in the case of Arabi’s arrest and trial.⁴⁸

The importance of the Egyptian encounter for the progression of her nationalist sympathies as she outlined it in *Seventy Years* has been replicated in scholarly responses to the detriment of the complex legacies of Empire in Gregory’s oeuvre. ‘Our Boys in India’ presents a positive account of imperial power, beneficial to those ruled over, as here British imperial power successfully managed to turn a disrupted and disorderly district into a peaceful one. Whilst she deliberately countered imperial rhetoric in ‘Arabi and His Household’, with regard to India she embraced that same rhetoric to justify the need for imperial government. Political ideology, it is implied, depended on the outcome of its policies, and the Empire was supported by Gregory as long as it proved beneficial to both sides.

‘Our Boys in India’ relied on the information on life in the civil service from an Irish Assistant Collector aged twenty-six in the South of India. The young man had ‘immense responsibility’ in his ‘magisterial function’ as ‘he can sentence [...] to fine or imprisonment’.⁴⁹ He was allowed to conduct searches of houses ‘[o]n resonable [sic] suspicion’ in cases of refusal to the salt tax, for instance. Yet what constituted ‘reasonable’ remained undefined. A remark on the possible practice of torture in order to gain a confession was made only in passing and without any negative commentary. Identifying armed robbery

⁴⁸ Gregory, ‘Our Boys in India’, pp. 1, 2, Berg.

⁴⁹ Lady Gregory to Paul Harvey (23 February 1886), Berg.

as the principal cause for disorder as well as court cases, the convicted were either ‘mercifully shot’ or ‘sent to lifelong imprisonment’ where they were taught ‘a peaceable handicraft, weaving fanciful carpets and rugs’.⁵⁰ Hence, a death sentence was regarded as a release from poverty and hunger whilst the teaching of handicrafts turned the criminals into productive members of the community. In either case, Britain’s system of punishment was justified and approved.

Rather than questioning Britain’s judicial system, her main concern was the ignorance of the officials in local customs and culture. Gregory noted that in the Native Protected States ‘there is more of local colour than British administration has left in those directly under its sway’ and ‘the people look happier’ there.⁵¹ Demonstrative of her interest in local life, she stressed native culture could best be observed ‘where Tommy Atkins has not come with his destroying gun’.⁵² She critically commented that ‘I have not met one single English officer or official with the sole exception of Cordery who has the least idea or takes the smallest interest in the history of the country, in its races or religion’.⁵³ Juxtaposing these two very divergent attitudes in the space of two paragraphs emphasises the complexity of Gregory’s attitude toward Empire.

Thus, her final report to Harvey, although generally favourable of a career in the civil service, displayed an ambiguity in line with her changing political attitude. Despite the fact that ‘there is loneliness to contend with’, the wealth and ‘individual liberty of action’ that comes with life in the civil service in India stood out as the main advantages.⁵⁴ Identifying with the British imperial elite, she was most ‘struck by the power exercised by *our* officials

⁵⁰ Gregory, ‘Our Boys in India’, pp. 5, 10, Berg.

⁵¹ Gregory, ‘Our Boys in India’, p. 11, Berg; Gregory, *Seventy Years*, p. 216.

⁵² Gregory, ‘Our Boys in India’, p. 11, Berg.

⁵³ Lady Gregory quoted in Kohfeldt, *The Woman Behind the Irish Renaissance*, pp. 74-75.

⁵⁴ Gregory, *Seventy Years*, p. 217. On the enjoyable living conditions see Lady Gregory to Paul Harvey (23 February 1886), Berg.

and the interest and responsibility of their work' [my italics].⁵⁵ However, she was aware that the Empire was an increasingly contested entity and the power it provided to its executors was unstable. Accordingly, the report to Harvey ended as follows:

I must remind you that the old order is changing in India as elsewhere, that these privileges will not remain unchallenged, that as someone said to me 'the country is waking up quicker than the Civil Service'. [...] A less imposing style of living may have become usual and natives may have been admitted to the places now held sacred to Englishmen. But if you resolve after all to throw yourself heartily and with goodwill and no grudging spirit into Indian interests and affairs, your work in these changing times may be more important and full of interests than ever before. And you will have the chance of showing that it is not mere monopoly of place that has given our Civil Servants the high reputation they have won as rulers of men.⁵⁶

Attaching both responsibility and duty to the civil service, Gregory identified rewarding aspects of Empire, expressed in terms of an imperial rhetoric akin to Lord Cromer, but with a more sympathetic attitude and regard for native culture.

The material advantages of working for the British establishment in an Irish context are explored in *The Rising of the Moon*. Here, however, criminal and judicial representative share a common nationalist sentiment whereby British law becomes unsuccessful due to collusion as, through a shared cultural heritage, loyalties to country rather than state come into focus. Yet it is Gregory's one-act tragedy *The Gaol Gate* which encapsulates her most complex exploration of the encounter of law, image and justice. On the one hand, the play encourages a policy of non-collaboration with the authorities. On the other hand, in echo of 'Arabi and His Household', Gregory explores the effects of politics on the individual. Thereby, the play illustrates two separate discourses and undermines the supremacy of the political ideology of either imperialism or nationalism. In the critically neglected play *The Wrens* a further shift can be noted as political loyalties are now determined by the consequences for the everyday life of individuals. In addressing the themes of imperial

⁵⁵ Gregory, 'Our Boys in India', p. 2, Berg.

⁵⁶ Gregory, 'Our Boys in India', pp. 14-15, Berg.

stereotypes, ideas of justice and the effects of politics on a daily basis, it becomes apparent that Gregory's very first publication on the legacies of Empire offered a theme that she would revisit in her plays whereby the public podium of the press was exchanged for the stage of Ireland's national theatre.

'You won't betray me': *The Rising of the Moon* (1907)

Gregory investigated the complexities of British law as applied in Ireland in her most staged play *The Rising of the Moon*. This one-act comedy revolves around three policemen who are on the look-out for a prisoner on the run who is expected to flee with the help of some friends from the quay in a seaport town. The prisoner enters the scene and with his repertoire of Irish rebel songs appeals to the common cultural heritage he shares with a representative of the Royal Irish Constabulary, who is temporarily left alone by his two colleagues. Evoking memories of the Sergeant's youth, he rouses the man's sympathy that ensures his escape; republican nationalism wins over the principles of law and order.⁵⁷

The Rising of the Moon, although it did not premiere until 1907, was written prior to *Spreading the News* and, therefore, before the opening of the Abbey Theatre. Whilst Gregory was writing the play in late July 1903, she was also working on the proofs of her book *Poets and Dreamers*, published the same year. The latter, a collection of essays including 'West Irish Ballads', 'Jacobite Ballads' and 'Boer Ballads in Ireland', demonstrates her longstanding interest in Irish political songs and offers an explanation for the play's title and theme. *Poets and Dreamers* echoed her article on 'The Felons of Our Land' of 1900 in which she wrote in favour of Irish ballads of rebellion and defeat.⁵⁸ Prompted by the Boer War, it is

⁵⁷ Lady Gregory, *The Rising of the Moon*, in Lady Gregory, *The Collected Plays, I, The Comedies*, ed. Ann Saddlemyer (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe and Irish University Press, 1979), pp. 57-68. Further page references are given parenthetically in the text, abbreviated *CPI*.

⁵⁸ Lady Gregory, 'The Felons of Our Land', *Cornhill Magazine*, vol. 8, no. 47 (May 1900), pp. 622-634. Note Gregory's comment on song in local Irish culture in her unpublished essay 'An Emigrant's Notebook': 'I have never been able to find many traces of real wit or pathos in the songs actually sung by the Irish peasants. They

considered to be her most political piece.⁵⁹ Gregory noted in her diary in April of that year that Count de Basterot, a neighbouring landlord, ‘read it, & gave me a talking to in the evening – complimentary as to style, but thinks I am going too far away from the opinions of my husband & my son’. She assured him that she had already decided ‘not to go so far towards political nationalism in anything I write again as in “Felons” partly because I wish to keep out of politics & work only for literature, & partly because if Robert is Imperialist I don’t want to separate myself from him’.⁶⁰ Gregory’s response in proclaiming a future adherence to separate literature and politics is complicated. De Basterot’s criticism implicitly suggests that a literary subject matter was by no means detached from or outside of politics. Furthermore, her comment demonstrates that she was sensitive to the pressures of a patriarchal society. Count de Basterot’s critical response to Gregory’s politics is typical of nineteenth-century expectations that a woman’s role was to support her male relatives. The actions of aristocratic women who pursued an independent political role were ‘branded unfeminine and socially compromising’ by their peers.⁶¹ However, over the course of her career Gregory did not consistently conform to such demands. Her engagement with the subject of political ballads put a strain on her loyalties to her son, her class, and her country.

The Rising of the Moon is the title of a ‘simple and picturesque’ song to which Gregory had referred in ‘The Felons of Our Land’.⁶² Written by the Fenian activist J.K. Casey from Mullingar, the lyrics allude to the 1798 rebellion:

Well they fought for poor old Ireland,
And full bitter was their fate

are usually of local composition or colouring & the beautiful ballads of Davis & Brennan seem to have no hold upon the hearts of the people. Perhaps they may be afraid to produce their stock of rebel songs before us who are not of themselves’. Lady Gregory, ‘An Emigrant’s Notebook’, p. 42, Emory.

⁵⁹ McDiarmid, ‘The Demotic Lady Gregory’, p. 220. McDiarmid views ‘The Felons of Our Land’ as a companion piece to ‘Arabi and His Household’, both published in England with the intent to present the English public with a sympathetic portrayal of the ‘felon’. Ibid., p. 222.

⁶⁰ Entry for 30 April 1900, in James Pethica (ed.), *Lady Gregory’s Diaries 1892-1902* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1996), p. 267. Hereafter abbreviated as *Diaries*.

⁶¹ Diane Urquhart, *The Ladies of Londonderry: Women and political patronage* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co, 2007), p. 3.

⁶² Gregory, ‘The Felons’, p. 624.

(Oh! What glorious pride and sorrow
Fill the name of ninety-eight!)
Yet, thank God, e'en still are beating
Hearts in manhood's burning noon,
Who would follow in their footsteps
At the rising of the moon!⁶³

Gregory heard of the landing of the French at Killala from her Catholic nurse Mary Sheridan and was thus acquainted with the nationalist narrative of the rebellion of the United Irishmen.⁶⁴ With the inclusion of the song, the play is given a revolutionary undercurrent; contrary to her proclamation, Gregory once again directly linked literature and politics.

'Felony is given in Johnson's dictionary as "a crime denounced capital by the law,"' Gregory wrote in her article, 'and this is how it, or perhaps I should use the word coined for Ireland, "treason-felony," is defined in Ireland also – a crime in the eyes of the law, not in the eyes of the people'. The 'felon' was defined as someone 'who has gone to death or to prison for the sake of a principle or a cause' whereby, Gregory concluded, 'the prison rather lends a halo than leaves a taint'. Irish society, however, distinguished between 'the felon', acting in the name of the country that turns him into a political prisoner, and other criminals; she noted, 'A thief is shunned, a murder prompted by brutality or personal malice is vehemently denounced, a sheep stealer's crime is visited on the third and fourth generations'. Yet she stated that 'I have known the hillsides blaze with bonfires when prisoners were released, not because they were believed to be innocent, but because they were believed to be guilty'.⁶⁵ This illustrates her experience that certain crimes against the state were celebrated as patriotic acts.

The division of loyalty to a system of justice enforced by foreign law and loyalty to one's people figured in Gregory's collection of essays, *Poets and Dreamers*, in which she quoted a verse from an undated and anonymous lyric:

⁶³ Gregory, 'The Felons', pp. 624-625.

⁶⁴ Gregory, *Seventy Years*, pp. 2-3.

⁶⁵ Gregory, 'The Felons', p. 623.

It is with the people I was,
It is not with the law I was;
But they took me in my sleep,
On the side of Cnoc-na-Feigh;
And so
To-morrow they will hang me.⁶⁶

These words are repeated by the escaped prisoner in *The Rising of the Moon* when he appeals to the Sergeant's nationalist sympathies, claiming that 'I am thinking it was with the people you were, and not with the law you were, when you were a young man' (*CPI* 65).

In her notes to *The Rising of the Moon*, she traced the inspiration for the play back to her childhood:

When I was a child and came with my elders to Galway for their salmon fishing in the river that rushes past the gaol, I used to look with awe at the window where men were hung, and the dark, closed gate. I used to wonder if ever a prisoner might by some means climb the high, buttressed wall and slip away in the darkness by the canal to the quays and find friends to hide from under the load of kelp in a fishing boat, as happens to my ballad-singing man.⁶⁷

With this rather romanticised idea of the 'felon', Gregory disguised the revolutionary basis and origin as we can find it in 'The Felons of Our Land'. In *Our Irish Theatre*, published in 1913, she placed the play in a more overt political context: 'I may look on the *Rising of the Moon* as an historical play, [...] for the scene is laid in the historical time of the rising of the Fenians in the sixties'.⁶⁸ The escaped prisoner can be thus understood as a Fenian rebel, belonging to that movement which contributed to the increasingly violent stereotype of the Irish in the British press. The political allusion would have been known to those in the audience familiar with the lyrics and, as she declared 'The Rising of the Moon' to be 'a more general favourite', this was likely to be the case.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Anonymous, undated Irish poem, in Lady Gregory, *Poets and Dreamers: Studies and Translations from the Irish by Lady Gregory* (Dublin: Hodges, Figgis, & Co.; London: John Murray, 1903), p. 86.

⁶⁷ Lady Gregory, *Seven Short Plays* (London/New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1909), pp. 197-198.

⁶⁸ Lady Gregory, *Our Irish Theatre: A Chapter of Autobiography* (London/New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1913), p. 96.

⁶⁹ Gregory, 'The Felons', p. 624.

This association with Fenianism invites a direct link between ‘The Felons of Our Land’ and the play. In the former, Gregory commented that although ‘it can hardly be called “rising”, [the Fenian rebellion of 1867] ‘found a large place in national song [...] for the Manchester triple execution’. She noted that ‘Some of the principal organisers escaped’ and mentioned that the two who were arrested in Manchester were helped by friends to escape from a prison van. Of those five ‘pitched upon as ringleaders’, ‘three were hanged publicly’ and subsequently entered the popular memory as martyrs as ‘It was believed that these men were put to death, not because they were guilty of murder, [...] but because [...] the mob had demanded a victim, and the lot had fallen not on one but on three’.⁷⁰ Not only does the title of *The Rising of the Moon* directly refer to the Fenian movement via the ballad’s author, but it also incorporates the elements of an escaped prisoner who takes flight with the help of friends and aspects of judicial practice as explored in her article.

Initially, the escaped prisoner is not referred to as such but is listed among the play’s characters as a ‘Ballad-Singer’.⁷¹ Denying him a personal name, in the Coole Edition he is referred to as ‘A Ragged Man’, rendering him potentially more dangerous as the description denies him the socially and culturally accepted position of a bard (*CPI* 59). Disguised in wig and hat, he presents himself to the Sergeant as ‘Jimmy Walsh’. In that choice of name, Edward Kopper proposes, Gregory deliberately hinted at yet another instance of the encounter between the Irishman and British law: the Lynchehaun case.⁷² James Lynchehaun’s real name was James Walshe whereby Gregory’s Fenian prisoner’s adoption of the name ‘Jimmy Walsh’ is suggestive.⁷³ The famous trial of James Lynchehaun, who attacked his English landlord Agnes McDonnell in October 1894 at Achill and was subsequently sentenced to penal servitude for life for murder, despite Mrs McDonnell’s survival, was well

⁷⁰ Gregory, ‘The Felons’, pp. 624, 629, 629, 630.

⁷¹ Gregory, *Seven Short Plays*, p. 32.

⁷² See Edward A. Kopper Jr., ‘Gregory’s The Rising of the Moon’, *Explicator*, vol. 47, no. 3 (April 1989), pp. 29-31.

⁷³ Kopper, ‘Gregory’s The Rising of the Moon’, p. 30.

known throughout Ireland and, after Lynchehaun's escape from Maryborough prison and flight to America in 1902, featured prominently in the headlines the year before Gregory wrote *The Rising of the Moon*. While nationalists celebrated him 'as a political exile', unionists were appalled by this 'brutal criminal attack glamorized as nationalist insurgency'. The case, John Millington Synge stated, also functioned in part as an inspiration for *The Playboy of the Western World*.⁷⁴

The Sergeant in *The Rising of the Moon*, as a Catholic Irishman working in the Royal Irish Constabulary, embodies this dichotomy. Established to secure law and order, Henry A. Blake summarised the function of the police force and its situation in Ireland in an imperial context in 1881:

The laws regulating its internal affairs and dealing with the security of person and property are laws that satisfy the English conscience. For centuries the Irish people doggedly refused to be bound by English laws, however beneficial; and of all the seven hundred years since the landing of Strongbow not sixty have elapsed since the Celtic Irishman was first admitted to the office of petty constable.⁷⁵

Written at the time of the Land War, agrarian outrages in Ireland sparked increasing interest and commentary on the police force and how to restore the country to order. In the same year, *Punch* featured a cartoon titled 'Two Forces' [Figure 4] in which the Irishman – armed with stones – threatens Britannia, standing on a Land League banner, who protectively holds her arm around Hibernia. Britannia's sword, with its inscription of 'THE LAW', stands in juxtaposition to the Irishman's hat band of 'ANARCHY'.

⁷⁴ Lionel Pilkington, *Theatre and State in 20th Century Ireland: Cultivating the People* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 57.

⁷⁵ Henry A. Blake, 'The Irish Police', *The Nineteenth Century: A Monthly Review* (February 1881), p. 389.



Figure 4 ‘Two Forces’, 29 October 1881, *Punch*.

Gregory commented that ‘the real fight in the play goes on in the sergeant’s own mind’.⁷⁶ As the advantages and disadvantages of the civil service in an imperial context had been observed in her essay ‘Our Boys in India’, the conflict of interests is further complicated in her home country as reputation comes into play. The Sergeant, reflecting on his work, establishes that ‘we have to do our duty in the force’ and emphasises the responsibility attached to the Royal Irish Constabulary: ‘Haven’t we the whole country depending on us to keep law and order? It’s those that are down would be up and those that are up would be down, if it wasn’t for us’ (*CPI* 60). The Sergeant admits: ‘If it wasn’t for the sense I have, and for my wife and family, and for me joining the force the time I did, it might be myself now would be after breaking gaol and hiding in the dark’ (*CPI* 65). Despite the financial

⁷⁶ Gregory, *Our Irish Theatre*, p. 96.

security – the service provides an annual income between £75-82 – the disadvantages are manifold:⁷⁷

Indeed it's a hard thing to be in the force, out at night and no thanks for it, for all the danger we're in. And it's little we get but abuse from the people, and no choice but to obey our orders, and never asked when a man is sent into danger, if you are a married man with a family (*CPI* 63).

Apart from social exclusion, it is suggested that the policemen put their lives at risk. Furthermore, imbedded is a tone of complaint that their work is not sufficiently recognized by the British Government.

The capture of the prisoner would bring in a reward of £100. Additionally, it is speculated that 'any man in the force that takes him will get promotion' (*CPI* 60). Yet the recapture of such an Irish 'felon' would not only result in profit, but also in blame from the local community and family members, a situation corresponding, to some extent, to that of an informer, an idea that will be explored in relation to Gregory's *The Gaol Gate*. 'And if we get him itself', one policeman states, 'nothing but abuse on our heads for it from the people, and maybe from our own relations' (*CPI* 60). Thus, loyalties are divided between 'duties', family, community and country (*CPI* 65). Whereas his colleagues appeal to his duty, insinuating that it will reflect badly on the force as 'If he makes his escape it won't be unknown he'll make it', the 'ragged man' who appears on the quay – the prisoner on the run in disguise – appeals to the nationalist sympathies of the Sergeant's youth (*CPI* 66).

The Sergeant displays an ambivalent attitude toward the 'ragged man' as he describes him in almost heroic terms:

It's a pity I had no chance of seeing him before he broke out of gaol. They say he's a wonder, that it's he makes all the plans for the whole organization. There isn't another man in Ireland would have broken gaol the way he did. He must have some friends among the gaolers (*CPI* 59).

⁷⁷ R. Bruce, 'The Royal Irish Constabulary: Their Origin, Organization, and General Character', *Murray's Magazine: a home and colonial periodical for the general reader* (January 1888), p. 29.

The reference to ‘the whole organization’ evokes a connection to a political movement that Gregory identified as Fenianism, establishing him as a political prisoner; the ‘felon’ acting for ‘a principle or cause’. His escape is alluded to as a non-violent outbreak, made possible through the help of friends. Failing in his attempt to pass the Sergeant under the pretence to sell ballads to the sailors, he tries to sell his sheets to him: ‘Maybe yourself might like one [...] Here’s a good sheet now. (*Turns one over.*) “Content and a pipe” – that’s not much. “The Peeler and the goat” – you wouldn’t like that. “Johnny Hart” – that’s a lovely song’ (*CPI* 61).

‘The Peeler and the Goat’, although it is only mentioned and neither sung nor quoted in the play, incorporates the main themes of the play: ‘money’, the Sergeant’s ‘sworn duty to the overgovernment’, an ‘appeal to nationalist sentiment’, ‘and a suspicion that the “goat”, in this case the escaped revolutionary, will have the last word’. Saddlemyer, quoting the first and final verse of the ballad, omits the most noteworthy theme and aspect of the lyrics. This anonymous ballad is crucially dated ‘shortly after the establishment of Sir Robert Peel’s police force’ in the early nineteenth century.⁷⁸ Peel established the Peace Preservation Force in 1814, deployed in specific areas of unrest. In 1822, a permanent constabulary was introduced and the two forces were joined in 1836 under the name of the Irish Constabulary, later the Royal Irish Constabulary. ‘The Peeler and the Goat’ was anthologized in Padraic Colum’s *Anthology of Irish Verse* in 1922 under the category of ‘Satires and Laments’.

The Peeler, ‘On duty and pathrollin’’, takes a goat on the road for ‘a sthroller’ and sends her ‘off to prison’. Despite the goat’s lamentation to be ‘no Rogue, no Ribbonman,/ No Croppy, Whig, or Tory’, the policeman remains staunch:

‘The consequence be what it will,
A peeler’s power I’ll let you know,
I’ll handcuff you, at all events,

⁷⁸ Ann Saddlemyer, ‘Music, Song and Much More ... Revisiting the Gregorian World’, in Laura P.Z. Izarra and Beatriz Kopschitz X. Bastos (eds), *A New Ireland in Brazil*, Festschrift in Honour of Munira Hamud Mutran (Editora Humanitas, 2008), p. 221.

And march you off to Bridewell O.
[...]

‘You readily would let me pass
If I had money handy O,
To thrate you to a potheen glass –
Oh! it’s then I’d be the dandy O.’⁷⁹

In this biting account, the policeman – the peeler – relies on his power as a representative of law. The absurdity of the arrest of a goat lampoons the police force which is furthermore presented as greedy and corruptible. It suggests that the peeler could be bribed for adequate money or drink to let the goat – representing the Irish – free. In its tone and plot, the ballad perhaps foreshadows *Spreading the News* with its staunch and satirized Resident Magistrate who arrests Bartley Fallon for murder without the evidence of a dead body. It can be asserted that Gregory’s main interest lay in the song’s reference to the Irishman facing British law in the form of the police force as it constitutes a potent theme in *The Rising of the Moon*. In its satirical and negative portrayal of the police, the ‘ragged man’ rightly concluded that the Sergeant ‘wouldn’t like that’ song. After all, there is no need for bribery in the play as the political prisoner assumes a shared cultural heritage.

The assumption is confirmed when the man sings, deliberately, a false verse of the song ‘Granuaile’, a ballad about the famous Irish pirate Grace O’Malley. In its reference to revolutionary activities in opposition to Elizabeth I, the Sergeant, at first, demands the singer to ‘Stop that; that’s no song to be singing in these times’ (*CPI* 63). Yet once he remembers the lyrics, he displays his weakness and nationalist sentiment:

MAN. But to think of a man like you knowing a song like that. [...] And isn’t it a queer world? ... Maybe it’s one of the boys you used to be singing with that time you will be arresting to-day or to-morrow, and sending into the dock.
SERGEANT. That’s true indeed.
MAN: And maybe one night, after you had been singing, if the other boys had told you some plan they had, some plan to free the

⁷⁹ Anonymous, ‘The Peeler and the Goat’, in Padraic Colum (ed.), *Anthology of Irish Verse*, edited with an introduction by Padraic Colum (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1922), pp. 201-203.

country, you might have joined with them ... and maybe it is you might be in trouble now (*CPI* 64).

The man, appearing to be surprised, skilfully enquires what other songs the Sergeant had sung in his youth and finds him knowing nationalist ballads such as ‘The Shan Van Vocht’ and ‘The Green on the Cape’ (*CPI* 64). The stage directions – both characters sitting back to back on a barrel with the placard of the wanted man pinned to it, smoking a pipe – indicate that ‘they are mirror images of each other’.⁸⁰ Yet despite the Sergeant’s admission that ‘I had a great spirit in those days’, he denounces his youthful nationalism: ‘I was foolish then, that time’s gone’ (*CPI* 64, 65). Instead, he prioritizes his work: ‘I have my duties and I know them’ (*CPI* 65). As the ‘ragged man’ starts singing ‘The Rising of the Moon’, an answering whistle is heard from the quay and the Sergeant realizes ‘That’s a signal’ and concludes: ‘You are no ballad-Singer’ (*CPI* 66). Here, then, song and politics conflate. As the prisoner’s disguise is lifted, the political potential of song – and culture by extension – is exposed.

Although the *Freeman’s Journal* praised the way that the play ‘worked into a climax which is exceptionally clever and telling’, subsequent events exemplify an ambivalent undercurrent:⁸¹

SERGEANT. You are the man I am looking for. [...]
MAN. I am a friend of Granuaile. There is a hundred pounds on my head.
SERGEANT. It’s a pity, it’s a pity!
MAN. Will you let me pass, or must I make you let me?
SERGEANT. I am in the force. I will not let you pass.
MAN. I thought to do it with my tongue. (*Puts hand in breast.*) What is that? [...]
SERGEANT. It’s my comrades coming.
MAN. You won’t betray me ... the friend of Granuaile (*CPI* 66).

The warning embedded in ‘must I make you’ exhibits the potential violent behaviour the previously harmless ballad singer is capable of. This is further epitomized when he confesses to his plan of luring the Sergeant into helping him escape by appealing to his loyalty to

⁸⁰ Murray, *Twentieth-Century Irish Drama*, p. 51.

⁸¹ ‘The Abbey Theatre’, *The Freeman’s Journal* (11 March 1907), p. 4, quoted in Robert Hogan and James Kilroy (eds), *The Abbey Theatre: The Years of Synge 1905-1909* (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1978), p. 174.

country rather than law. Turning the strolling bard into a manipulating and scheming political prisoner, Gregory emphasises the immediate threat even further by the stage directions that instruct that he '*Puts hand in breast*', presumably to resort to a hitherto hidden weapon with which he may override the Sergeant.

This indication of a potential threat is expanded as the 'ragged man' tells the Sergeant of the character of the wanted man, either speaking the truth about himself or attempting to whip up fear:

I saw him in my own place. In the County Clare. I tell you you wouldn't like to be looking at him. You'd be afraid to be in the one place with him. There isn't a weapon he doesn't know the use of, and as to strength, his muscles are as hard as that board (*CPI 62*).

The description alludes to bodily strength, violent behaviour and attack, features which are akin to the imperial stereotype of the Irish. The police force, it is suggested, is particularly threatened by an attack:

MAN. There was a poor man in our place, a sergeant from Ballyvaughan. – It was with a lump of stone he did it.
SERGEANT. I never heard of that.
MAN. And you wouldn't, sergeant. It's not everything that happens gets into the papers. And there was a policeman in plain clothes, too... It is in Limerick he was. ... It was after the time of the attack on the police barrack at Kilmallock. ... Moonlight ... [...]
SERGEANT. It's a whole troop of police they ought to put here to stop a man like that. (*CPI 62*)

In his defiance of British law, the 'ragged man' does not need to depend on violence as the common bond of Irish culture wins over the duty to British law and government. Just as Gregory had swayed public opinion in favour of Arabi through the written word, her disguised prisoner effects change through song.

The cultural victory, it is implied, is only temporary with the following indication that the revolution is still to come. As the Sergeant lets him pass, he says:

MAN (*going towards steps*). Well, good-night, comrade, and thank you. [...] Maybe I'll be able to do as much for you when the small rise up and the big fall down ... when we all

change places at the Rising (*waves his hand and disappears*) of the Moon.

SERGEANT (*turning his back to audience and reading placard*).

A hundred pounds reward! A hundred pounds!
(*Turns towards audience.*) I wonder, now, am I as
great a fool as I think I am? (*CPI 67*)

In echo of Gregory's observation in 'Our Boys in India' that 'privileges will not remain unchallenged' and that 'the old order is changing', the play succinctly explores the tensions in Irish society in which questions of loyalty are particularly prevalent. This leaves the Sergeant questioning his actions, indicating uncertainty and possible regret. The repeated references to the reward suggest that he is not only torn between the loyalties of law and country, but also, as Pethica has noted, between 'the claims of political idealism and the materialist concerns of ordinary life'.⁸² Anne Fogarty proposes that the 'play succeeds in simultaneously constructing and deconstructing nationalist ideals'.⁸³ Arguably, however, Gregory constructs and dismantles the ideology of both nationalism and imperialism. In fact, she demands that her audience critically interrogate their own position. The stage directions indicate that the Sergeant, with his back to the audience, places himself among them. By channelling the focus to the reading of the placard, when the Sergeant once again 'turns towards' the auditorium the final question is an open one for the audience to contemplate. Moreover, the final line is as much a question directed toward the playwright herself.

Indeed, autobiographical similarities can be drawn between the Sergeant and his creator as acknowledged by Ann Saddlemyer and Judith Hill. In the play, Gregory relied on the Irish ballad tradition to stir the sergeant's subliminal nationalism, a tradition she later acknowledged to be partially responsible for her own evolving nationalist sympathies.⁸⁴ Saddlemyer argues that:

he is treated sympathetically; as both landlord and patriot herself, nourished on those same Fenian ballads, she lived in the perennial conflict of cultures that

⁸² Pethica, 'Lady Gregory's Abbey Theatre drama', p. 69.

⁸³ Fogarty, "'A Woman of the House'", p. 116.

⁸⁴ See Gregory, *Seventy Years*, pp. 13-14.

troubles the policeman. She urged her actors to understand that the Sergeant's actions were 'not a change of mind,' but the release and temporary ascendancy of 'a deeper instinct, his Irish heart and memory of youth that had been moved unconsciously to himself.'⁸⁵

It is suggested that Gregory's nationalist leanings were not only a change of opinion, but a 'release' of just such a "'deeper instinct'". However, the open question at the end indicates Gregory's uncertainty as to where her own loyalties should reside. Her son's enthusiasm for the imperial project created fears of potential alienation between mother and son; the freedom of the Irish rebel posed a direct threat to the Sergeant's life and, therefore, to the representative of law and order. If that status quo was shaken or dismantled, her own position in society would be placed under threat and with it her son's inheritance. Once again, parallels can be drawn between Gregory's essay on 'Our Boys in India' and *The Rising of the Moon*. She had estimated that if Harvey would 'throw [himself] heartily and with goodwill and no grudging spirit into Indian interests and affairs', his work would 'be more important and full of interests than ever before'. In this sense, then, Gregory appears to query her own involvement in Irish cultural nationalism with its inherent political implications as explored in the play.

However, despite the open ending, the rebel is on the loose. In its exploration of British law, as applied and executed in Ireland, *The Rising of the Moon* presents a successful defiance of the British judicial system: the Irish are not silenced or paralysed by the representative of law and order, but, through a collective cultural memory, circumvent the law by collusion. The problem had already been highlighted in early 1881, a time of land agitation, by Henry A. Blake in an article on 'The Irish Police':

When we find a greater increase of a kind of crime always present to a greater or lesser degree, we are likely to be driven to the conclusion that the Irish police system is bad; or that the members of the force are not faithfully discharging their

⁸⁵ Saddlemyer, 'Music, Song and Much More', p. 224. See also, Hill, *Lady Gregory*, p. 174.

duty; or that the causes of crime lie so deep that it cannot effectually be reached by any police system based on lines of British freedom.⁸⁶

The Sergeant's ultimate disloyalty to the state, combined with his uncertainty as to the right response, reflects the 'ambivalent position of Irishmen in English uniform'.⁸⁷ The play's complexities become further apparent when one considers its production history and reception.

Although *The Rising of the Moon* was finished by late July 1903, it premiered almost four years later on 9th March 1907. Both the delay in production and the choice in staging the play in the immediate aftermath of the *Playboy* riots provide a telling moment in the theatre's production history. James Flannery notes that the Abbey's reading committee had advised Gregory in March 1904 'that *The Rising of the Moon* would not be produced unless the role of the policeman were rewritten to show him in a less favourable light'.⁸⁸ This suggests that the committee feared the play would be offensive to and alienate a nationalist audience. Gregory repeated this explanation in her note in *Seven Short Plays* in 1909: it 'was considered offensive to some extreme Nationalists before it was acted, because it showed the police in too favourable a light'.⁸⁹ 'For two years', Yeats remarked even years later in a lecture given in London in 1921, 'the company refused to attempt the play, because they said that a policeman was incapable of a patriotic act'.⁹⁰ Yeats's chronological error aside, the main issue of contention, it appears, was the questionable simultaneous loyalty to country and law.

⁸⁶ Blake, 'The Irish Police', p. 385.

⁸⁷ Jochen Achilles, 'Transformations of the Stage Irishman in Irish Drama: 1860-1910', in Wolfgang Zach and Heinz Kosok (eds), *Literary Interrelations Ireland, England and the World, Volume 3 National Images and Stereotypes* (Tübingen: G. Narr, 1987), p. 107.

⁸⁸ James Flannery, *W.B. Yeats and the Idea of a Theatre: The Early Abbey Theatre in Theory and Practice* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1976), p. 326.

⁸⁹ Gregory, *Seven Short Plays*, p. 198.

⁹⁰ 'The Abbey Theatre', *The Irish Times* (6 May 1921), p. 5, quoted in Robert Hogan and Richard Burnham (eds), *The Years of O'Casey, 1921-1926 – A Documentary History* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1992), p. 26.

Yet if the play was considered to be offensive to nationalists, the delay is all the more unusual in light of its publication in the November 1903 issue of *The Gael*.⁹¹ This American periodical was subtitled ‘*a monthly journal devoted to the preservation and cultivation of the Irish language and the autonomy of the Irish nation*’. As the title suggests, the journal conflated cultural with political intentions. Therefore, the publication of Gregory’s play in its pages would indicate that *The Rising of the Moon* was considered suitable for the *The Gael*’s readership and, thereby, was ascribed a political intent. Whereas this quick publication might have been triggered by Gregory’s wish to secure the American copyright for her play in case of future overseas production, it equally suggests that the playwright made a distinction between printed text and performance.

This is further illustrated by the play’s inclusion in the December 1904 issue of *Samhain*, an occasional publication edited by Yeats and associated with the Abbey Theatre.⁹² Despite the reading committee’s concerns earlier in the year, the play was seen as suitable to appear in print. In this ‘commemorative issue’, Yeats paid tribute to Annie Horniman’s purchase of the Mechanics’ Institute and her offering of the newly rebuilt and refurnished struture to house the Abbey Theatre, which opened that December.⁹³ In the editorial ‘The Dramatic Movement’, Yeats acknowledged that ‘a certain number of propagandist plays are unavoidable’. However, he determined that the theatre seeks an audience that appreciates first and foremost art for art’s sake. In hostility toward politics, he demanded ‘a public that has learnt to care for a play because it is a play and not because it is serviceable to some cause’.⁹⁴

⁹¹ Lady Gregory, ‘The Rising of the Moon’, *The Gael: a monthly journal devoted to the preservation and cultivation of the Irish language and the autonomy of the Irish nation*, (November 1903), pp. 376-378.

⁹² Lady Gregory, ‘The Rising of the Moon’, *Samhain* (An Occasional Review), (Dublin: Sealy Bryers & Walker and T. Fisher Unwin, December 1904), pp. 45-52, in W.B. Yeats (ed.), *Samhain*, October 1901-November 1908, edited by B. C. Bloomfield (London: Frank Cass and Co., 1970).

⁹³ Paige Reynolds, ‘Reading Publics, Theater Audiences, and the Little Magazines of the Abbey Theatre’, *New Hibernia Review*, vol. 7, no. 4, (Winter 2003), p. 76.

⁹⁴ W.B. Yeats, ‘The Dramatic Movement’, in *Samhain* (December 1904), pp. 9, 6.

It is ironic, then, that Gregory's *The Rising of the Moon* appeared in the subsequent pages of *Samhain*.

It was only in the previous year, in September 1903, that Yeats had written to Frank Fay proposing 'a special free performance of our most popular plays or at any rate of our most patriotic ones'. Rather than advocating an elite audience and an apolitical aesthetic, he had further proposed to 'invite to this performance the members of the Dublin Working men's organization'. The incentive for such a populist approach was Yeats's wish for the theatre to be competitive and even be 'beyond all rivalry if we put on nothing above the heads of the working men and a good deal that was national'. To this end, Yeats suggested refraining from a staging of his play *The King's Threshold*, in favour of either *Heads or Harps* or *The Rising of the Moon*. He added: 'I am afraid there will be some little commotion over Synge's morality [*In the Shadow of the Glen*], and that we had better not actually start with it among the working men'.⁹⁵ To Yeats, Gregory's play was clearly to be identified as one of the 'patriotic ones'. In November, a meeting of the reading committee indicated to Yeats that Fay 'wants to drop political plays' which, in turn, complicated the 'fight for "The Rising of the Moon"'.⁹⁶ This idea stands at odds with Yeats's imagined audience in 'The Dramatic Movement'. However, shortly after the appearance of Gregory's play in the Irish periodical press, the *Northern Whig* commented on 14 January 1905 that the play had offended 'a few extreme nationalists', confirming earlier doubts raised by the reading committee.⁹⁷

Appended to the 1904 *Samhain* issue was also Horniman's offering letter in which the English heiress stressed her support for the Irish National Theatre's 'artistic objects' and 'high artistic ideal'.⁹⁸ Effectively, Horniman put a ban on politics, and Gregory's play –

⁹⁵ W.B. Yeats to F.J. Fay (25 September 1903), *CL3*, pp. 432-433.

⁹⁶ W.B. Yeats to Lady Gregory (9 November 1903), *CL3*, p. 462.

⁹⁷ See John Kelly's note in *CL3*, pp. 23-24.

⁹⁸ 'Miss Horniman's Offer of Theatre and the Society's Acceptance', in *Samhain* (December 1904), pp. 53-54.

whether it might offend nationalists or unionists – would have been too risky to produce. Whereas Yeats had categorized the play as ‘patriotic’ (and by implication as potentially propagandistic) the previous year, he now presented it in light of his proclamation for an aesthetic literature. For Yeats, Frazier argues, ‘it was not propaganda because the artist did not intend that it be propaganda’.⁹⁹ However, such reasoning is complicated when considering Yeats’s liberty in tagging certain plays ‘patriotic’ when it suited his purposes. Thus, his and Gregory’s politics regarding the theatre’s ‘no politics’ depended on their role as individuals, writers or directors. Yeats’s appeal for a select and appreciative audience was further in keeping with Horniman’s demand that ‘The prices of the seats can be raised, of course, but not lowered’ in order to ‘prevent cheap entertainments from being given’.¹⁰⁰ Two years later, however, the need for an increased audience resulted in the change of lowering ticket prices from one shilling to six pennies. Both Synge and Gregory had lobbied for this measure with an eye to the practicalities ‘of building a paying audience’. As Reynolds has demonstrated, this resulted in a significant change regarding those frequenting the Abbey:

The audience of upper and upper middle classes sympathetic to the Abbey’s early fantasy of the purely aesthetic now grew proportionally smaller in favor of more members from the middle classes whose perspective was shaped not only by the Gaelic League’s ardent nationalism, but also by the pervasive influence of the popular commercial stage, the Catholic Church, and the newspapers flooding the country.¹⁰¹

Likewise, the increasing politicisation of Irish society needs to be considered in this context with the founding of Sinn Féin in 1905 and, the following year, Griffith’s *United Irishman* re-emerged under the same title as his new political organisation.

In late 1906, fellow Revivalist Alice Milligan, in great anticipation of *The Rising of the Moon*, called in the pages of *Sinn Féin* for a production of Gregory’s play:

⁹⁹ Frazier, *Behind the Scenes*, p. 208.

¹⁰⁰ ‘Miss Horniman’s Offer of Theatre and the Society’s Acceptance’, in *Samhain* (December 1904), pp. 53-54.

¹⁰¹ Paige Reynolds, *Modernism, Drama, and the Audience for Irish Spectacle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 47, 48.

There is one of Lady Gregory's pieces that has not yet been staged. Is it because the players cannot sing traditionally? I allude to *The Rising of the Moon*. The day that it is acted first I will be there to see, though I should travel from Cahir Daniel, or Malin or Slyne Head. I think, moreover, on that night the gallery will be quite full, and the Abbey Theatre will ever after be popular.¹⁰²

Yet the Abbey's popularity – although not its publicity – was threatened when Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* premiered on 26 January 1907. Among those raising their voices in protest at the play's representation of Irish identity and womanhood were Griffith and Milligan. In the aftermath of the *Playboy* riots, the Abbey experienced a stark drop of audience with receipts sinking as low as £10 for a two-show performance on a Saturday in April.¹⁰³ On 2 March, Milligan, in an open letter in *Sinn Féin*, specifically addressed Gregory 'to exercise due control and not permit the managing directors' advertising tendencies to spoil the high standard of art'.¹⁰⁴ As argued by Levitas, this is indicative of Gregory's standing 'as the honest partner' of the Abbey's directorate.¹⁰⁵ Notably, the Abbey scheduled a revival of Gregory's *The White Cockade*, *The Gaol Gate*, and *Hyacinth Halvey* between February and April in order to attract larger audiences.

Although the production of *The Rising of the Moon* had already been considered in autumn 1906, the premiere proved timely. Milligan's demand for the play in addition to her call on Gregory in the pages of *Sinn Féin*, perhaps, incited the directorate to put the play on in order to appease that political faction of Irish society and regain that public support. Rather than the play's possible offence to nationalists, it was specifically its nationalist politics that was supposed to draw a profit and popularity. Edward Kopper suggests that the 'patriotic sentiment' of *The Rising of the Moon* 'helped win back to the Abbey some of the Dublin patrons who had been dissuaded' by Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* just a couple

¹⁰² Alice L. Milligan, 'Yeats and the Drama', *Sinn Féin* (24 November 1906), p. 3, quoted in Hogan et al, *The Abbey Theatre: The Years of Synge*, p. 120.

¹⁰³ Ben Levitas, *The Theatre of Nation: Irish Drama and Cultural Nationalism 1890-1916* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), p. 141.

¹⁰⁴ Alice Milligan, *Sinn Féin* (2 March 1907), quoted in Levitas, *The Theatre of Nation*, p. 141.

¹⁰⁵ Levitas, *The Theatre of Nation*, p. 141.

of months earlier.¹⁰⁶ Indeed, William Fay ascribed to *The Rising of the Moon* ‘a really “rebelly” theme that immediately endeared it to the great heart of Ireland and did something towards placating our political “friends”’.¹⁰⁷

Milligan’s anticipated success for the play proved prophetic as it became Gregory’s most staged drama with 524 performances between 1907 and 1932, being revived every year with the exception of 1928.¹⁰⁸ This even outnumbered the *Playboy* and *Cathleen ni Houlihan* which were produced 355 and 459 times respectively between 1904 and 1932.¹⁰⁹ *The Rising of the Moon* counts among one of the very few revivals which Gregory’s plays have seen in recent years, with 17 performances at the Abbey in both 1968 and 1970.¹¹⁰ Micheál Ó hAodha observed in 1974 that ‘To three generations of playgoers the very title *The Rising of the Moon* meant the Abbey’, highlighting its centrality on that theatre’s stage.¹¹¹

Theatre critic Joseph Holloway termed it ‘Lady Gregory’s little patriotic incident’ and praised it as ‘a splendidly written little piece’.¹¹² She even received approval from ‘A clergyman [who] turned to me after *Rising of the Moon* & said “That is better than ever”’ and another man told her that ““You ought to be a proud woman – a proud woman!””¹¹³ In addition to this positive reception among an Irish audience, the play was equally well received in England. Writing to Blunt in June 1907, Gregory noted that ‘I had an extraordinary ovation last night after “*The Rising of the Moon*” – the whole theatre seemed in

¹⁰⁶ Kopper Jr., ‘Gregory’s *The Rising of the Moon*’, p. 29.

¹⁰⁷ W.G. Fay and Catherine Carswell, *The Fays of the Abbey Theatre: An Autobiographical Record* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1935), p. 222.

¹⁰⁸ <http://www.abbeytheatre.ie/archives/search/plays/rising%20of%20the%20moon/> Accessed 24.06.2013. The frequency in revivals of particular plays was negatively noted, for instance, in the *Irish Statesman*: ‘The fidelity of even the Abbey audience can be tried by too frequent a repetition of *The Rising of the Moon* or *The Shadow of a Gunman*’. R.J.P. Mortished, ‘What Is Wrong with the Abbey Theatre?’, *Irish Statesman* (15 March 1924), p. 13, quoted in Hogan et al, *The Years of O’Casey*, p. 189.

¹⁰⁹ http://www.abbeytheatre.ie/archives/play_detail/11021;

<http://www.abbeytheatre.ie/archives/search/plays/kathleen%20ni%20houlihan/> Accessed 24.06.2013.

¹¹⁰ <http://www.abbeytheatre.ie/archives/search/plays/rising%20of%20the%20moon/> Accessed 25.02.2011.

¹¹¹ Micheál Ó hAodha, *Theatre in Ireland* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1974), p. 62.

¹¹² Entry for ‘Saturday 9th, 1907’, in Joseph Holloway, *Joseph Holloway’s Abbey Theatre – A Selection from his unpublished Journal Impressions of a Dublin Playgoer*, ed. Robert Hogan and Michael J. Neill, with a preface by Harry T. Moore (Carbondale/Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1967), p. 88.

¹¹³ Lady Gregory to William Butler Yeats (Fragment, 1909-10), Folder 800, Berg.

a storm of excitement. Someone said to me “You have succeeded in bringing treason into the heart of London” – so that ought to stand to my credit!’¹¹⁴ Particularly the latter comment identifies a political component to the play. However, in spite of the play’s currency among nationalists, Yeats claimed in 1908 in a letter to John Shawe-Taylor, Gregory’s nephew and unionist Boer War veteran, that ‘Cathleen Ni Houlihan, Gaol Gate, and The Rising of the Moon should not offend anybody as being too National, for they have been greatly applauded at Oxford and Cambridge and in London’.¹¹⁵

Offence regarding the figure of the Sergeant came not, as initially anticipated, from the nationalist quarter, but from the establishment. *The Rising of the Moon* was strongly criticised by unionists for its disloyal portrayal of the Royal Irish Constabulary. Following its premiere, *The Irish Times* reviewed the play at length: ‘With all due respect to Lady Gregory this is not a fair portrait of the typical Irish constable, and the Irish public will be most reluctant to accept it as such’. Although the reviewer praised the actors, ‘their high artistic attainments were unable to redeem a piece essentially false to experience, and having as its hero a treacherous poltroon’.¹¹⁶ The newspaper, mouthpiece of the establishment, negated any possibility of disloyalty among the Royal Irish Constabulary, finding the potential common bond of the ballads incomprehensible: ‘If there is one body in this country which more than another Irishmen of all classes feel a just pride in it is the Royal Irish Constabulary, and any attempt to hold up its members as cowards and traitors is certain to be bitterly resented’. In recollection of the most recent protests regarding Synge’s *Playboy*, Gregory’s play, ‘it may safely be predicted, will also come in for a good deal of hostile criticism’. The review even went as far as proclaiming that ‘the management of the theatre have in the selection of their plays been by no means successful in suiting the popular

¹¹⁴ Lady Gregory to Wilfrid Scawen Blunt (17 June 1907), Folder 37, Berg.

¹¹⁵ William Butler Yeats to John Shawe-Taylor (18 August 1908), *CL*.

¹¹⁶ ‘Abbey Theatre’, *The Irish Times* (11 March 1907), p. 7.

taste'.¹¹⁷ Yet in staging *The Rising of the Moon*, that is exactly what the directors did; and reactions akin to the *Playboy* riots did not occur and there was a limited hostile response from the authorities. When the Company attempted to hire the uniforms for the policemen's costumes from Dublin Castle in 1912, 'our messenger came back empty-handed. An order had been issued by the authorities that "no clothes were to be lent to the Abbey because The Rising of the Moon was derogatory to His Majesty's forces"'.¹¹⁸

Both Yeats and Gregory capitalized on the criticism voiced by the establishment. In June 1907, she published 'An Explanation' in response to the riots of the *Playboy* in *The Arrow*. She asserted that 'A Unionist paper made an attack upon *The Rising of the Moon*, on the ground of its belittling the Royal Irish Constabulary, and yet I have been told that there was "never such great laughing" as when the little comedy was read in a Belfast Police Barrack'.¹¹⁹ Her reference to the four-month Belfast dock strike of 1907 demonstrates the topicality of the play as members of the Royal Irish Constabulary mutinied to guard the replacement workers, thus undermining the unshakable loyalty of the policemen to do their duty. Indeed, this event perhaps contributed to the paper's mellowed response to a later revival of the play. In her note to the play, as published in *Seven Short Plays*, Gregory acknowledged *The Irish Times*'s attack, but added that 'after the Belfast police strike that same paper praised its "insight into Irish character"'.¹²⁰ Yet despite such 'insight', the police declined their help in lending the theatre uniforms for its productions after Easter 1916. In December 1919, for instance, Gregory noted in her journal: '[Arthur] Sinclair writes to Robinson "The authorities wouldn't let me do *Rising of the Moon* round Tipperary. They considered it seditious"'.¹²¹

¹¹⁷ 'Abbey Theatre', *The Irish Times* (11 March 1907), p. 7.

¹¹⁸ Gregory, *Our Irish Theatre*, p. 97. See also William Butler Yeats to Lady Gregory (19 March 1912), *CL*.

¹¹⁹ Lady Gregory, 'An Explanation', *The Arrow* (1 June 1907), quoted in Hogan et al, *The Abbey Theatre: The Years of Synge*, p. 157.

¹²⁰ Gregory, *Seven Short Plays*, p. 198.

¹²¹ Entry for 17 December 1919, *Journals I*, p. 115.

The perceived incompatibility of state service and loyalty to one's country was emphasised further by Yeats in 1921, towards the end of the Anglo-Irish war:

A leading Dublin newspaper declared that it was an insult to His Majesty's forces, and from that day we have been denied the privilege of having the cast-off clothes of the police. With the growing crisis in Ireland it is becoming a greater deprivation. If we do not have Home Rule after the present crisis is over we cannot go on, because there are so many police in our plays. (Laughter.)¹²²

The increasing militarisation of the conflict heightened the political reception of the play as Yeats noted that by 1921 it 'was now recognized as almost a ritual of Nationalism'.¹²³ This claim is further supported by other companies and amateur societies asking for the rights to perform the play.

As Gregory was very protective of her plays, her permissions are telling. Later that year, she proudly wrote to Blunt that 'While taking no part in politics I am able to lend a hand in other ways [...] so I feel quite a benefactor'.¹²⁴ Yet she allowed for both the Abbey Theatre and her play to be used for political purposes:

Also a letter pleased me from someone in Dublin. "Kevin Barry's Own Company will hold a concert in aid of war-stricken Volunteers in the Queen's Theatre on October 23rd" and asking "permission to produce your beautiful little drama, *The Rising of the Moon*". I am so glad to give it. And the "Prisoners' Dependents Fund" secretary has written "We are very grateful to you and gladly accept your kind offer" of the Abbey performance of *Revolutionist* for them.¹²⁵

Gregory's pleasure in giving permission for the production in support of Irish republicanism seems in sharp contrast to her contention that art and politics were separate. The highly political context of Terence MacSwiney's play and the reference to Kevin Barry, the IRA volunteer who had been executed the previous year at the age of eighteen, are therefore remarkably contradictory. In particular, lending the play to Kevin Barry's Own Company

¹²² 'The Abbey Theatre: Lecture by Mr. Yeats', *The Irish Times* (6 May 1921), p. 5.

¹²³ Ibid. In an undated letter to Yeats, Gregory noted that she was approached by an officer 'for a performance for soldiers of *Rising of the Moon* & I gave it for nothing (he never said thank you!) but I refused a Scotch "entertainers" I knew nothing of. One is glad to help if it is genuine – but I think it better to keep hold on them'. Lady Gregory to William Butler Yeats (Sunday 6th), uncatalogued, Berg.

¹²⁴ Lady Gregory to Wilfrid Scawen Blunt (12 October 1921), Folder 49, Berg.

¹²⁵ Entry for 12 October 1921, D.J. Murphy (ed.), *Lady Gregory's Journals: Volume One, Books 1-29, 10 October 1916- 24 February 1925* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1978), p. 302. Hereafter abbreviated as *Journals I*.

suggested its contemporary appeal for republicans in its topic of the Irish encounter with British law; Barry was ‘one of the most celebrated republican martyrs of the war’.¹²⁶ As he became the recurring theme of ballads, the play’s emphasis on songs as a marker of a common cultural heritage and bond between those acting against the law and those enforcing it suited the political context.

Throughout her life, Gregory adhered to the distinction between culture and politics. For her, politics principally referred to the operation of government, parliaments and armed insurrection rather than the development of Irish cultural life or public morality. In light of this, then, Gregory’s central focus on questions of loyalties and duties in *The Rising of the Moon* can be understood as a focus on questions of morality. Rather than offering a black-and-white narrative, Gregory’s portrayal of Irish society is multi-layered. In her educative endeavour, the playwright’s intention is to encourage her audience to be self-reflective. It is precisely in the play’s double ending – with the successful escape of the prisoner and the Sergeant’s simultaneous doubts regarding his actions – that we can identify Gregory as a public moralist.

In February 1900, she had commented in her diary on Yeats’s speech to the Irish Literary Theatre’s audience after a successful production of George Moore’s *The Bending of the Bough*, ‘thanking the audience for the reception’: ‘[He] claimed that they were at least patriotic in intention, & promising that those for next year would be equally patriotic in intention’. Gregory added in a note of disapproval and disagreement: ‘There will I am afraid be a disappointment, for we must try & keep politics out of plays in future’.¹²⁷ Not only does this complicate Yeats’s own distinction between intended and accidental propaganda, but it suggests Gregory’s alertness to the fine line of such a distinction. Likewise, it would imply that first and foremost her own work is not intended to be political. Yet three months later she

¹²⁶ Alvin Jackson, *Ireland 1798-1998* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), p. 250.

¹²⁷ Entry for 24 February 1900, *Diaries*, pp. 246-247.

published 'The Felons of Our Land', earning her criticism for its politics. Again, three years later she penned *The Rising of the Moon*, indebted to her work on Irish ballads. It was not only staged deliberately to appease and cater toward a nationalist and politicised audience, but was considered as a 'patriotic' play from the outset. As the play's production history demonstrates, the author's intention, director's pragmatics, and personal beliefs present an intricate web of conflated and conflicted loyalties that are also prevalent in *The Gaol Gate*.

'An unconquered man': *The Gaol Gate* (1906)

In 1921, in the midst of Ireland's revolutionary years, Gregory remarked:

Just now ... I seem possessed with the passion for Ireland, for my country. ... If this truce should come to an end, the bitter war begin again, I wish to put myself on the side of the people, I wish to go to prison, I think even to execution (tho' I will not take a life – yet one may attain to this by 'comforting the King's enemies').¹²⁸

Not only does this statement express her republican sympathies, it also carries with it a romanticised notion of self-sacrifice and a life-long inspiration of the 'felon' tradition in Ireland as explored with regard to *The Rising of the Moon*. In 1928, Gregory reflects in her journal on 'the dignity of our "rebel" prisoners'. Among those she knew, she lists Arabi Bey, Frank Gallagher, Terence MacSwiney, 'Brennan the Moonlighter', and – above all – Wilfrid Scawen Blunt.¹²⁹ Whereas *The Rising of the Moon* featured an escaped prisoner, in *The Gaol Gate* Gregory focuses on the imprisoned 'felon'. Galway gaol, which held fascination for the adolescent Gregory whenever she passed it, functioned as the setting.¹³⁰ Gregory, as we have seen, was inspired by the physical presence of the prison which separated those who acted against the rule of law from society. In the aftermath of Blunt's imprisonment at Galway gaol

¹²⁸ Entry for 20 July 1921, Holograph Journal Vol. 8 quoted in James Pethica, "'Our Kathleen": Yeats's Collaboration with Lady Gregory in the Writing of *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*', in Deirdre Toomey (ed.), *Yeats and Women* (London: Macmillan, 1997), p. 216.

¹²⁹ See Entry for 15 December 1928, *Journals II*, pp. 361-363.

¹³⁰ Kohfeldt, *The Woman Behind the Irish Renaissance*, p. 19.

in 1888 – he was sentenced to two months for his involvement in a public meeting in resistance to the Crimes Act on Lord Clanricarde’s estate in Co. Galway the previous year – Gregory went to the trouble to arrange a visit to view his prison cell.¹³¹ Gregory had written four poems in response to his incarceration, one of which is titled ‘Without and Within’.¹³²

This poem refers to the opposing worlds of life inside and outside of prison. This opposition is foregrounded in the first line of each verse which alternates between ‘Without the gate, without the gate’ and ‘Within the gate, within the gate’. Whilst outside ‘Red skirted women rail and rate’, inside ‘He sits and ravel out his fate’. Gender roles are clearly allotted and Gregory expresses sympathy for the ‘captive’, ascribing his unmentioned deed an heroic character: ‘A couch of honour is his bed / A glory rests about his head’.¹³³ The women’s activities remain confined to the traditional realm of talking and lamenting outside the gate. Like the women in the poem, the task of remembering the prisoner’s fate is taken on by Gregory herself through the act of writing. She would comment in later years in an interview that ‘The prison cell is conducive to great literary effort’.¹³⁴ This could be applied, it appears, to both those within and without the prison cell and can be read, in part, as an autobiographical comment as Arabi’s capture and subsequent trial sparked her own first publication.

Blunt, McDiarmid argues, was a rebel and her muse: ‘all her later felons would be permutations of Blunt’.¹³⁵ His profound influence is further acknowledged by Pethica who notes:

¹³¹ Gregory, *Seventy Years*, 231. On the difficulty of visiting the prison cell see Entry for 21 May 1888, Diary, Typescript, Part 5, 6 July 1887 – 11 Nov. 1888, Typescript (original), unsigned, 90p., 3p. inserted (many p. mutilated), p. 98, Berg.

¹³² See James Mitchell, ‘The Imprisonment of Wilfrid Scawen Blunt in Galway: Cause and Consequence’, *Journal of the Galway Archaeological and Historical Society*, vol. 46 (1994), pp. 91-92. The other three poems are entitled ‘A Triumph’, ‘A Lament’, and ‘If’. See *ibid.*, pp. 92-95.

¹³³ Mitchell, ‘The Imprisonment of Wilfrid Scawen Blunt’, pp. 91-92.

¹³⁴ *Philadelphia Public Ledger* (18 January 1912), quoted in McDiarmid, ‘The Demotic Lady Gregory’, p. 214.

¹³⁵ McDiarmid, ‘The Demotic Lady Gregory’, p. 220. It should be emphasised that Gregory was engaging with ‘prison literature’ prior to Blunt’s imprisonment. For instance, during Queen Victoria’s jubilee celebrations she was reading John Mitchell’s *Jail Journal*. See Pethica, ‘A Dialogue of Self and Services’, p. 96.

Lady Gregory's most overtly pro-Nationalist remarks in the period up to and following the imprisonment occur almost exclusively in her correspondence with Blunt, suggesting [...] that while her stance had indeed been profoundly influenced, her opinions were wavering more in response to personal loyalty than as a result of a coherent redefinition of political convictions.¹³⁶

Her admiration and support for an individual, rather than his political ideology, has been demonstrated already in the case of Arabi Bey and his nationalist campaign. 'I hope you will never take to agitating like Wilfrid Blunt!', she wrote in a letter to her young protégé Paul Henry, illustrating her loyalty to Blunt but detachment from his politics. 'I know he is wrong, or in a wrong groove – but I don't like to hear of a friend being mauled by the police & marched off to a Loughrea jail'.¹³⁷ Gregory, it appears, de-contextualized individuals whereby she saw her support within the realm of the non-political. Yet in the choice of themes for her plays she tapped into the wider political framework. Thus, McDiarmid's proposition that *The Gaol Gate* is merely 'a dramatized version of her 1882 poem "Without the gate" [sic] – but in entirely de-eroticized form' unjustly reduces the play's inspirations, complexity and theme to a remnant of her former love interest.¹³⁸

On 26 October 1920, the day after Terence MacSwiney's death following seventy-four days of hunger strike at Brixton Prison, Lady Gregory noted in her journal:

Mrs. S. called, stayed some time talking of 'country newses' from the English point of view – then incidentally said, 'The Lord Mayor is dead – there has been a wire' – I said 'He was a brave man'. She gave a superior smile and said: 'I believe his sisters are rather...' 'Rather what?' 'Rather rowdy' – I got up and opened the window and [...] didn't sit down again and she left, and I looked up at the hills for a while, towards the west. 'It is not a little thing a man to die, and he protecting his neighbour'.¹³⁹

The final sentence, a direct quotation from Gregory's play *The Gaol Gate* (1906), establishes an association between the dramatic character Denis Cahel and the Lord Mayor of Cork,

¹³⁶ Pethica, 'A Dialogue of Self and Service', p. 107.

¹³⁷ Lady Gregory to Paul Henry ('Thurs' [25 Oct? 1888?]), Folder 5, Berg.

¹³⁸ McDiarmid, 'The Demotic Lady Gregory', p. 223. Cathy Leeney equally perceives the play as 'a coded token of her love for Blunt'. See Cathy Leeney, 'Augusta Gregory's *Kincora*: The Circle and the Spiral', *PaGes: Postgraduate Research in Progress*, vol. 3 (1996), p. 27.

¹³⁹ Entry for 26 October 1920, Gregory, *Journals I*, p. 196.

Terence MacSwiney. In both instances, the men turned their bodies into political tools: Cahel refused to inform on his neighbours; MacSwiney went on a fast immediately after his arrest on 12 August 1920. In both instances, the men reject British judicial legitimacy, sacrificing their bodies in protest. In both instances, the choice to do so is a personal decision that has wider repercussions. In *The Gaol Gate*, Denis's immediate family, saved from being shunned by the community if he had turned informer, rejoice in his heroic silence. Similarly, when MacSwiney's dead body was returned to Ireland, a large crowd followed the funeral procession to St Finn Barr's cemetery, Cork, providing the cause for Irish independence with a national icon.

Despite such striking similarities, the Abbey Theatre did not capitalize on the contemporary currency of *The Gaol Gate*, but turned to MacSwiney's own play, *The Revolutionist*, and W.B. Yeats's revised version of *The King's Threshold*.¹⁴⁰ However, a foreign audience recognised Gregory's play's topicality. In September 1920, a French translation of *The Gaol Gate* was staged in a Parisian drawing room. The play's original setting outside the gate of Galway gaol was transferred to Mountjoy Prison 'where too many dramatic incidents were witnessed only a few months previously, and wherein so many of the children of Cathleen ni Houlihan paid their tribute of devotion to the motherland'.¹⁴¹ A consideration of the play's context and its production history reveals the tensions between its literary meaning and its added value through its performance in a particular historical context.¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ Lauren Arrington, 'Staging the Hunger Strikes: *The Revolutionist* and *The King's Threshold* at the Abbey Theatre, 1920-1921', in Brian Griffin (ed.), *New Voices in Irish Studies – Essays on History and Literature* (Bath: Bath Spa University Press, 2009), pp. 75-85.

¹⁴¹ *The Irish Times* (18 September 1920), p. 20.

¹⁴² For a reading of the tensions between the written and the spoken word in regard to Gregory's and Yeats's play *Cathleen ni Houlihan* see Lionel Pilkington, "'Every Crossing Sweeper Thinks Himself a Moraliser': The Critical Role of Audiences in Irish Theatre History", *Irish University Review, Special Issue: Literature, Criticism & Theory* (Spring/Summer 1997), pp. 152-165.

The Gaol Gate was based on an initial scenario of only three lines: ‘He is an informer; he is dead; he is hanged’.¹⁴³ Gregory’s idea to investigate ‘the feeling of centuries in this country against an informer’ is thus linked to the intersection of Irish society with the British judicial system.¹⁴⁴ This one-act tragedy considers a community after an arrest, and the effects on both kin and neighbourhood of an Irishman behind bars. Written between 20th and 23rd August 1906, she proudly proclaimed that she ‘never changed a word of it’, suggesting a clear idea and delivery (*CPII* 283).¹⁴⁵ Although not referred to in the title, the description of the opening scene specifies the setting as ‘*Outside the gate of Galway Gaol*’ (*CPII* 5). Mary Cahel and Mary Cushin, the mother of the imprisoned Denis Cahel and her daughter-in-law, have travelled a day’s journey to warn him about the neighbours’ rumours: “‘It is Denis Cahel,” they were saying, “that informed against them in the gaol”’ (*CPII* 5). Standing in front of the gate, they lament the severe consequences they will have to suffer if he is indeed found to be an informer. They muse over the possible content of a letter they were sent, but which they are unable to read. When the gatekeeper appears, they are told that Denis was hanged the previous day and that his friends were released due to lack of evidence. The lamentation about the shame the act of informing would have brought on the family turns into rejoicing at the prisoner’s courage. The play focuses on the world outside the prison gate, on the reputation of Denis’s family and his own identity in the local community. However, through the gatekeeper, the mediator or messenger between the two systems, the audience receives a glance inside the prison wall with references to judicial procedures.

In the summer of 1888, a group of moonlighters, which included two of Gregory’s tenants, was arrested in her neighbourhood. ‘Cahil and Brennan have been carried off to

¹⁴³ Gregory, *The Collected Plays, I*, p. 262.

¹⁴⁴ Lady Gregory to John Quinn (12 October 1906), Berg.

¹⁴⁵ Gregory, *The Gaol Gate*, in Lady Augusta Gregory, *The Collected Plays, II, The Tragedies and Tragic-Comedies*, ed. by Ann Saddlemyer (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe and Irish University Press, 1971), pp. 5-10; p. 283. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text abbreviated *CPII*. A manuscript draft of *The Gaol Gate* dated 20 August – 23 August [1906] is held at Berg with an early typescript dated 23 September 1906.

Galway gaol', Gregory wrote in her diary in May 1888, 'on charge of being concerned in a Moonlighting outrage 6 weeks ago when a man was fired at and wounded for having taken a boycotted piece of land'.¹⁴⁶ A few days later, she was visited by Mrs Cahil 'who declares her son is innocent' and who asked for "a letter" to get him out'.¹⁴⁷ Again, the following day, John Brennan called at Coole 'wanting his brother rescued from the fangs of the law'. Gregory noted that he 'declares his innocence (which I am inclined to believe) and denounces the informer Flanagan'.¹⁴⁸

As her sympathy rose, she wrote to Colonel Tynte the day before the commencement of the trial in order to give 'a good character to the Brennan family'. However, she remarked in the diary that 'I could not hear anything to say in Cahil's favour'.¹⁴⁹ On 3 June she wrote:

A letter from Colonel Tynte saying there is at present no evidence against Brennan – and that he has showed my letter to both solicitors – so I hope he will prove innocent. His brother here in the afternoon to ask for a letter – rather awkward as I didn't wish him to know I had written lest the Cahils should expect me to do the same. I am sorry for old Mrs. C. but not so sorry as I should be if she had not asked for tea and medicine in the same breath with denouncing the informer against her son. [...] Brennan had been to Galway, for his brother's trial, but it was a 'Star Chamber' one and he was not allowed into the courthouse. He had stood by the gaol gate, however, to see the prisoners taken in, and Thomas had called out to him, 'If Lady Gregory is come home, go to her to help me.' The assurances as to Cahil's innocence are fainter, but he is 'a widow's son, and has a nice way of living'.¹⁵⁰

The diary entry exemplifies Gregory's awareness of the incisive attitudes against informers in her immediate neighbourhood. In addition, the image of Brennan standing 'by the gaol gate', the imprisonment for moonlighting, the fired shot and the surname of Cahil suggest a strong link between this incident and *The Gaol Gate*, a connection that has previously been overlooked by critics. Again, her relations with individual members of the community are invocative of her support and her distinction between Brennan and Cahil is demonstrative of

¹⁴⁶ Entry for 25 May 1888, Diary, Typescript, Part 5, pp. 98-99, Berg.

¹⁴⁷ Entry for 29 May 1888, Diary, Typescript, Part 5, p. 99, Berg.

¹⁴⁸ Entry for 30 May 1888, Diary, Typescript, Part 5, p. 99, Berg.

¹⁴⁹ Entry for 31 May 1888, Diary, Typescript, Part 5, p. 99, Berg.

¹⁵⁰ Entry for 3 June 1888, Diary, Typescript, Part 5, pp. 100-101, Berg.

the dependency of her assistance on personal, rather than ideological, allegiances. However, there is, nonetheless, her adherence to the principles of justice as she commented: ‘Col. Tynte thinks my friend Brennan is guilty, but there is no evidence against him, so I hope he will escape’.¹⁵¹ Indeed, ‘My Moonlighting friend Brennan has been released’, she was able to note three days later with some pride.¹⁵²

In the summer of 1906, shortly before Gregory was writing *The Gaol Gate*, Egypt once again became a *cause célèbre* of the British press due to the colonial government’s conduct. On 13 June, five uniformed British officers went to shoot pigeons in the small village of Denshawai and were subsequently attacked by the villagers. Fifty-two villagers were afterwards taken into custody and tried by a special tribunal which only dealt with acts of violence against the British army of occupation. They were permitted no jury. Four villagers were sentenced to death on 27 June for murder and hanged publicly, a further twelve were sentenced to imprisonment. What Blunt called a ‘monstrous sentence’ precipitated criticism from Lady Gregory’s friend George Bernard Shaw.¹⁵³ He drafted a petition for the release of the remaining prisoners, and Lady Gregory, W.B. Yeats and Blunt were among the signatories. ‘I had a letter about signing a petition for release of Denshaw prisoners, & will certainly do so’, Gregory wrote to Blunt on 17 September 1907.¹⁵⁴

In this petition, Shaw outlined the hypocritical nature of the British government in the Denshawai affair. He remarked that ‘nothing had happened that might not have been expected in any English village if a shooting party of foreigners, ignorant of our language and customs, had begun to shoot the domestic animals and farm stock under the impression that

¹⁵¹ Entry for 7 June 1888, Diary, Typescript, Part 5, p. 102, Berg.

¹⁵² Entry for 10 June 1888, Diary, Typescript, Part 5, p. 103, Berg. His brother called at Coole in order to thank her, telling her that Brennan “‘hadn’t had a bit of fear since he saw Col Tynte reading a letter in court with Coole Park at the head of it.” “Sure, Lady Gregory could bring a man from the foot of the gallows and she’s given me a character”!!’ Entry for 12 June 1888, *ibid.*, p. 104.

¹⁵³ Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, *My Diaries Being a Personal Narrative of Events 1888-1914, Part Two: 1900-1914* (1920; New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1921), p. 147.

¹⁵⁴ Lady Gregory to Wilfrid Scawen Blunt (17 September 1907), Folder 38, Berg.

they were *ferae naturae*'.¹⁵⁵ Appalled that the House of Commons, informed by a 24-hour notice of what would happen, did not intervene by telegram to stop 'these barbarous lashings and vindictive hangings', Shaw criticized the British government in a letter to the editor in *The Times* on 7 July 1906.

Employing the same analogies he used in his petition, Shaw wrote at length about 'The Denshawai Horror' in his preface to *John Bull's Other Island*. He condemned the White Papers which were supposed to 'whitewash the tribunals and the pigeon-shooting party, and to blackwash the villagers'. He suggested that Blunt's *Atrocities of British Rule in Egypt* (August 1906) was the counter-narrative to the Parliamentary Papers: 'When they have read it they will appreciate [...] why Home Rule is a necessity not only for Ireland, but for all constituents of those Federations of Commonwealths which are now the only permanently practicable form of Empire'. In a later edition of the preface, Shaw added a couple of pages entitled 'Twenty Years later' in which he wrote that Easter 1916 was the sequel to the Denshawai affair. As in Egypt, the English disgraced themselves again by their demeanour in Dublin: 'All that was necessary was to blockade the Post Office until its microcosmic republic was starved out and made ridiculous'. Yet the British artillery bombarded Dublin city, executed the leaders of the rising and made them heroes overnight, 'martyrs'.¹⁵⁶ Although the context is different, the application of British law in Ireland and the repercussions are similar. The realism and topicality of *The Gaol Gate* becomes apparent and the inspiration for the play, as outlined by Gregory, can be expanded to her support for an indigenous population outside of Ireland as well as her criticism of the practice of the British system of justice.

¹⁵⁵ See John Kelly and Ronald Schuchard (eds), *The Collected Letters, Volume IV: 1905-1907* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 724.

¹⁵⁶ George Bernard Shaw, *Prefaces by George Bernard Shaw* (London: Constable, 1934), pp. 467, 467, 468, 468, 469, 469.

This topicality of the play soon became apparent when it was put into rehearsal at the Abbey in October 1906. Gregory sent a copy to John Quinn, friend and adviser on her American copyrights, and described it as ‘an unconsidered trifle’. Writing on 12 October, about a week before its premiere, she informed him:

a curious thing has happened. I came from its first rehearsal a few days ago, and on my way home learned of the outrage, an outrage at Athenry, in which a policeman was shot, dangerously wounded... and today I hear there have been arrests, a man called Cahel being one of those arrested. We cannot stop my play, and I don’t think we ought to if we could, for it is not justifying homicide.¹⁵⁷

Aware of the timeliness, she appears sensitive to the tragedy’s possible political message and a potential reception that was unintentional. She stresses, as in her three-line scenario, that her focus is on the act of informing and the immediate consequences for the informer’s next of kin rather than on the actual crime committed.

Arriving at the gate, Mary Cushin is struck by the size of the wall that separates the prison, the place where British law and order reigns, from the Irish countryside where agrarian outrage is thriving. ‘There was surely never in the world such a terrible great height of a wall’, she expresses with a sense of intimidation (*CPII* 5). The scenery supported the magnitude of this architectural barrier, as is noted in a review in *The Academy*: ‘the high gate of the gaol occupie[d] almost all the stage’.¹⁵⁸ ‘The lighting of the gloomy gate’, theatre-goer Joseph Holloway commented, ‘and the high repellent wall just suited the scene enacted and added to the pathetic grandeur of the tragedy of humble life’.¹⁵⁹ This emphasis on the stature of the wall, architecturally designed to prevent escape but also to impose power, underlines the juxtaposition of two worlds of justice.

Informing is an act that has veritable implications for both the informer and those informed upon, and it brings into focus the opposing systems of British and Irish law. This contentious issue had already been raised by Blake in 1881:

¹⁵⁷ Lady Gregory to John Quinn (12 October 1906), Berg.

¹⁵⁸ *The Academy* (17 November 1906), p. 493.

¹⁵⁹ Entry for 20 October 1906, in Holloway, *Joseph Holloway’s Abbey*, p. 73.

Unfortunately, not one in five hundred of the community, be he gentleman or peasant, looks upon the commission of crime upon another as a matter affecting anybody but the Government. It is entirely a matter for the police, and neither the desire for security nor the temptation of a large reward will induce any person to offer assistance. [...] It is thus not strange that detection, or rather conviction, of crime in Ireland is difficult, but that any convictions can be obtained where society seems to have lost the instinct of self-preservation.¹⁶⁰

In 'The Irish Police', Blake alludes to difficulties of cooperation between representatives of British law and authority and the Irish, indicating that the latter adhered to a system of law and order that was outside of state norms. Blake also, perhaps unintentionally, hints at corruption within the system of justice whereby, on occasion, testimonies were believed to be bought or coerced, an aspect that is equally noticeable in Gregory's play. The dichotomy of those two worlds within and without the prison is interrogated in *The Gaol Gate*.

Mary Cushin is critical of the sergeant who, she tells her mother-in-law, 'was boasting, they were telling me, [...] it was he himself got his confession with drink he had brought him in the gaol' (*CPII* 5). The sergeant is presented as a corrupt official at the beginning of the play. In part, this reflects an attempt to put the blame on someone else and deny Denis any responsibility in his supposed act of informing. The old woman joins in:

MARY CAHEL.	They might have done that, the ruffians, and the boy have no blame on him at all. Why should it be cast up against him, and his wits being out of him with drink?
MARY CUSHIN.	If he did give their names up itself, there was maybe no wrong in it at all. Sure it's known to all the village it was Terry that fired the shot.
MARY CAHEL.	Stop your mouth now and don't be talking. You haven't any sense worth while. Let the sergeant do his own business with no help from the neighbours at all (<i>CPII</i> 5-6).

The proclamation that the local community knows that the shot was fired by their neighbour Terry Fury underlines the suspicion that the authorities have gaoled the wrong person. However, the response by Denis's mother that the neighbours should not collaborate with the authorities emphasises the idea of the wall separating the two systems. The Sergeant is

¹⁶⁰ Blake, 'The Irish Police', p. 391.

neither given a name nor does he appear on stage. Everything we learn about him is through the discussion of the other characters. That they do not name him suggests that they do not perceive him as belonging to their community, but rather as imposed upon them from outside. The discussion between the two women nevertheless demonstrates the different opinions within the community with Mary Cushin questioning the basis and efficiency of the judicial system in Ireland, and Mary Cahel advocating a policy of non-collaboration.

The play's possible advocacy of non-collaboration was criticised by *The Irish Times* where it was described as 'a rather unconventional, not to say unconvincing, piece of work'. The paper condemns the women's refusal to cooperate and deliver the name of the man who fired the shot in stating: 'They [...] leave to spread the news of [Denis's] magnanimity in dying rather than reveal the identity of the real assassin'.¹⁶¹ Although Gregory's prediction that 'we are sure to be attacked by Unionists as encouraging crime' did not materialise, the review nonetheless encapsulates a critique against the priority of loyalty to one's country rather than to the system of justice.¹⁶² Such incomprehension mirrors the English audience's position as outsider, unacquainted and unfamiliar with Irish society.

When Terence MacSwiney began his fast immediately upon his arrest, he equally adopted a non-collaboration policy, successfully refusing to be force-fed. His hunger strike addressed not only a national, but an international audience. This was facilitated by the coverage in international press. The hunger striker, confined to the prison cell, demanded and depended on an audience – just as in a theatrical performance. As compellingly demonstrated by Reynolds, 'Through the vehicle of mass culture, his body became a text on which messages were inscribed and disseminated to audiences around the world'.¹⁶³ The theatricality

¹⁶¹ 'The Abbey Theatre', *The Irish Times* (22 October 1906), p. 8.

¹⁶² Lady Gregory to John Quinn (12 October 1906), Berg.

¹⁶³ For a detailed account of MacSwiney's hunger strike in terms of a theatrical performance see Reynolds, 'Modernist martyrdom: scripting the death of Terence MacSwiney', in Reynolds, *Modernism, Drama, and the Audience for Irish Spectacle*, pp. 116-155, p. 117.

of the hunger strike is poignantly described by Frank Gallagher in the diary of his imprisonment in Mountjoy:

Now the greatest drama of a generation [...] The players bloodless, moist, with the smell of death in them [...] An audience of white, pain-lined faces, hungry for consolation [...] What a play it is! [...] Not only the actors now, these tight-skinned, clammy bodies on the prison pallets [...] The whole Nation has crowded into the cast [...] It is the world which has become the audience.¹⁶⁴

Notably, although Denis Cahel is at the centre of the plot in Gregory's play, the audience never sees or hears him. Like MacSwiney's, his self-sacrifice within the prison walls is dependent on an audience outside the walls. The French production of the *The Gaol Gate* demonstrates, in the context of the hunger strikers at Mountjoy prison as well as the Lord Mayor's hunger strike at Brixton, that the response to political martyrdom transcended national borders.

In *The Gaol Gate*, Gregory addressed the theatricality of self-sacrifice when she offers a nuanced interrogation of such a political decision and its implications. If Denis provides the sergeant with the names of those who had participated in moonlighting and of the person who fired the shot, he will save his own life but will be forced to leave the local community due to the disgrace he will have brought upon his name and family. 'It is only among strangers, I am thinking, he could be hiding his story at all', his mother says (*CPH* 6). Mary Cahel proposes that the only option for the young couple is to sell their land and leave for America. Left behind on her own, she would take the little child, too young to make the long voyage, to the workhouse and 'give him some other name' (*CPH* 7). In this case, the family would silently withdraw and seek anonymity. If Denis withholds the information, he will be hanged but celebrated in the collective memory of the community for his loyalty. Indeed, in her keen at the end of the play Mary Cahel advises her daughter-in-law to '[g]ather up [...] the clothes for your child; they'll be wanted by this one and that one' (*CPH* 10). In that case, the family's

¹⁶⁴ Frank Gallagher, *Days of Fear* (London: John Murray, 1928), pp. 68-69.

response is directed outward and Denis's decision is publicised locally. The proposition to hand out tokens in honour of Denis's memory can be seen as a form of performance, as is his mother's keen at the end of the play. This aspect of collecting memorabilia of the hero in a local setting was also prevalent in the real case of Terence MacSwiney. The artist Albert Power modelled a portrait bust of MacSwiney only a week before his death, followed by the circulation of picture postcards of the image, creating a national audience for the drama behind bars.¹⁶⁵

The severity of social stigma attached to informers in Ireland is inevitably linked to the application of an unfamiliar law in Irish society. Ann Saddlemeyer suggests that 'the personal tragedy of *The Gaol Gate* is overcast by the helplessness of the ignorant country folk in the grip of a foreign law which they cannot understand and which does not seek to understand them'.¹⁶⁶ This suggests that the British system of bureaucracy, with its procedures, documents and written communication was ineffective. Despite having been sent an official letter about Denis's sentence, the two women are unable to obtain the communicated information in time. Not only were they unable to read the letter when finally delivered, but they were, moreover, not expecting any post.¹⁶⁷ The element of helplessness introduces the idea of fate, or as Gregory suggested 'My two poor women were in the clutch of the Woman in the Stars' (*CPII* 262). However, technically Denis has the choice of speaking or keeping silent. Thus, he is not only 'a sheep sacrificed to the community', as suggested by Edward Kopper, but, through his own agency, embodies one possible response to British law.¹⁶⁸ Gregory's view of the two women's fated lives indicates that there is no

¹⁶⁵ Arrington, 'Staging the Hunger Strikes', p. 76.

¹⁶⁶ Saddlemeyer, *In Defence of Lady Gregory*, p. 88.

¹⁶⁷ It has to be noted that the census of Ireland for 1911 shows that out of 182,224 inhabitants of Co. Galway 27,871 were registered as illiterate whilst 6,196 could read only. See *Census of Ireland, 1911, Area, Houses, And Population: Also the Ages, Civil or Conjugal Condition, Occupations, Birthplaces, Religion, and Education of the People. Province of Connaught* (London: His Majesty's Stationary Office, 1912), p. 164.

¹⁶⁸ Edward A. Kopper, *Lady Gregory: A Review of the Criticism* (Butler, PA: Modern Irish Literature Monograph Series 2, 1991), p. 82.

room for independent agency. For the Irish country people, keeping silent is seen as the only valid option.

It is with regard to this helplessness in the face of British law that it comes, perhaps, as no surprise that *The Gaol Gate* has also been linked to another well-known case in Ireland, the Maamtrasna murders. On 17 August 1882, John Joyce was murdered in his house at Maamtrasna, Co. Galway, along with his mother, wife and children. At first, it was believed to be an agrarian crime committed by a secret society. However, soon after the murders, ten men from the immediate neighbourhood were accused and arrested. Of those three accused and hanged in Galway Gaol on 15 November 1882, Myles Joyce was afterwards considered to be innocent rendering the Maamtrasna murders a miscarriage of justice. Jarlath Waldron notes that Myles Joyce's wife, Bridget Joyce, 'is thought to have been the inspiration for Lady Gregory's play, *The Jail Gate [sic]*'.¹⁶⁹ Although the source for this allegation remains unknown, considering the content and subject matter of the play, a link to this local occurrence is possible.¹⁷⁰ The murder case had the theme of informers incorporated as two of those initially arrested and accused of murder, Thomas Casey and Anthony Philbin, 'turned informers' and were subsequently exempted from the prosecution.¹⁷¹ Thomas Casey withdrew his former testimony during the trial whereby Myles Joyce was exonerated and an investigation was opened by M.P. Timothy Harrington.¹⁷² The Gregorys were in Egypt at the time of the incident, but as regular readers of the *Irish Times*, and the case being linked to their home county, Gregory would have been aware of the Maamtrasna murders. Barry

¹⁶⁹ Jarlath Waldron, *Maamtrasna: The Murders and the Mystery* (Dublin: Edmund Burke Publisher, 1992), p. 155. According to locals, Bridget's daughter was born the day after her husband was hanged and, travelling to Galway soon after, 'She positioned herself at the western end of the "Salmon Weir" bridge, outside the main gate of the Jail and there, it is said, she spent nine days keening her husband'. Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ See Frank Shovlin, *Journey Westward: Joyce, Dubliners, and the Literary Revival* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012), pp. 24-25.

¹⁷¹ John Garvin, *James Joyce's Disunited Kingdom and the Irish Dimension* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan; New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1976), p. 166.

¹⁷² Ibid., p. 16. See also Timothy Harrington, *The Maamtrasna massacre: impeachment of the trials: (with appendix containing report of trials and correspondence between Most Rev. Dr. M'Evilly and the Lord Lieutenant)* (1884) (Bristol Selected Pamphlets).

O'Brien referred to the murders in his biography of Charles Stewart Parnell who had 'asked for an inquiry into the trials of the Maamtrasna murderers' in 1885.¹⁷³ Gregory, who was acquainted with O'Brien, had read the book, quoting it regarding the year of 1882: 'A year of sensational murder. One of the darkest periods of the land agitation in Ireland'.¹⁷⁴

Reporting on the trials, the newspaper noted that the crowds inside and outside of the court were anxious 'to catch a glimpse of' the accused. The trial became a spectacle. In its description of the imprisoned, the *Irish Times* assigned the British system of justice a reformatory, positive effect:

The prisoners have much improved in appearance since their arrest. The regularity of prison life has given them a smarter aspect, and they have evidently paid much attention to their dress, which is now that of respectable peasants. One of them is an old, grey-haired man. But none of them exhibit the wild mountaineer they showed when taken into custody in Connemara.¹⁷⁵

Incorporating imperial stereotypes of the Irish, the mentioning of the clothes and the poor state of appearance also features in *The Gaol Gate*. The gatekeeper brings Denis's clothes to the two women: 'There now is all he brought in with him; the flannels and the shirt and the shoes. It is little they are worth altogether; those mountainy boys do be poor' (*CPH* 9).

The aspect of unfamiliarity with the system as presented in *The Gaol Gate* is equally apparent in the case of the Maamtrasna murders as it was noted that '[n]one of the witnesses can speak English' and an interpreter was needed in court.¹⁷⁶ James Joyce, in his short essay entitled 'Ireland at the Bar' which was originally published in Italian in *Il Piccolo della Sera* on 16 September 1907, a year after Gregory's play was staged at the Abbey, equally drew on the Irish countryman in a British court. Focusing on the case of 'the poor old man' Myles Joyce, Joyce presents the scene in the court as '[o]n the one hand there was the officious interpreter, on the other, the patriarch of the miserable tribe who, unused to civic customs,

¹⁷³ Barry O'Brien, *The Life of Charles Stewart Parnell, 1846-1891, In Two Volumes – Vol. II* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1898), p. 49.

¹⁷⁴ Gregory, *Seventy Years*, p. 63.

¹⁷⁵ 'The Maamtrasna Murders', *The Irish Times* (2 November 1882), p. 3.

¹⁷⁶ 'The Maamtrasna Murder', *The Irish Times* (13 November 1882), p. 7.

seemed quite bewildered by all the legal ceremonies'. The dichotomy of speech and a sense of helplessness is overtly presented with Myles 'protesting, shouting, almost beside himself with the distress of not understanding or making himself understood, weeping with rage and terror' and the interpreter merely presenting an answer of 'yes' or 'no'.¹⁷⁷ In fact, John Garvin asserts that contemporary accounts do not concur with Joyce's representation and, although the presence of an interpreter was acknowledged, 'there is no record of Myles Joyce's having failed to understand the proceedings at his trial or of his having indulged in passionate pleas'.¹⁷⁸

Joyce did not just put the emphasis on the helplessness in the face of British law, but also in the face of British public opinion. He wrote that:

The figure of this bewildered old man, left over from a culture which is not ours, a deaf-mute before his judge, is a symbol of the Irish nation at the bar of public opinion. Like him, Ireland cannot appeal to the modern conscience of England or abroad. [...] Abroad, Ireland is not spoken of except when some trouble breaks out there. [...] So the Irish figure as criminals, with deformed faces, who roam around at night with the aim of doing away with every Unionist.¹⁷⁹

Myles Joyce's ascent to the status of local hero was due to the presence of one journalist who, understanding Irish, was able 'to give the condemned man's last words to the Irish-speaking population of the west of Ireland'. Among his last words, he was heard to say 'It's a poor thing to die on the scaffold for what I never did'.¹⁸⁰ Denis Cahel, whose last words we do not witness in *The Gaol Gate*, is equally turned into a local hero when his mother rejoices 'It is not a little thing for him to die, and he protecting his neighbour!' (*CPII* 10). The representation of the Irishman in the British press was based, for instance, on agrarian outrages and criminal behaviour.

¹⁷⁷ James Joyce, 'Ireland at the Bar', in James Joyce, *Occasional, Critical and Political Writing*, ed. Kevin Barry (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 145-147; pp. 145, 146.

¹⁷⁸ Garvin, *James Joyce's Disunited Kingdom*, p. 166.

¹⁷⁹ Joyce, 'Ireland at the Bar', p. 146.

¹⁸⁰ Garvin, *James Joyce's Disunited Kingdom*, pp. 168, 167.

The British legal system, with its institutions, personnel and procedures, had for its main objectives structuring and organizing Irish society, to achieve and maintain order. As a major pillar of a civilized society, the British judicial system established rules and regulations, delivering punishment on the evidence provided. Such a system included a preventive element which aimed to curtail further crimes. Denis's mother and wife are told:

- GATEKEEPER. He is buried since yesterday in the field that is belonging to the gaol.
- MARY CUSHIN. It is a great hardship that to have been done and not one of his own there to follow after him at all.
- GATEKEEPER. Those that break the law must be made an example of. Why would they be laid out like a well behaved man? A long rope and a short burying, that is the order for a man that is hanged.
- MARY CUSHIN. A man that was hanged! [...] My curse upon them that brought harm on you, and on Terry Fury that fired the shot! (*CPII* 9)

When she is told that Denis's friends, Terry Fury and Pat Ruane, were set free, the young widow asks 'What justice is there in the world at all?' (*CPII* 9).

Uninformed about the specific reasons for Denis's conviction, the audience is left wondering whether he is in fact innocent. *The Irish Independent* noted that the dialogue between the two women 'transpires that he was quite innocent, that he never handled a gun in his life, that the real culprit was a neighbour, that the conviction was secured on false evidence'.¹⁸¹ Indeed, according to the gatekeeper, the main evidence against Denis is based on the fact that he 'was taken near the house. They knew his footmark. There was no witness given against the rest worth while' (*CPII* 10). If it is believed that Denis protected his neighbours and died an innocent man, his action becomes self-sacrificial and is understood as an heroic act against the British. As a representative of the British, the gatekeeper received mixed reviews. Played by Frank Fay at the premiere in 1906, *The Freeman's Journal*

¹⁸¹ *The Irish Independent* (22 October 1906), p. 7.

remarked that ‘Fay was the bluff but kind-hearted gate-keeper’.¹⁸² In contrast, *The Irish Independent* commented that ‘[t]he callous official bluntly informs [the two women] that they are just a day too late’. The reviewer added that the gatekeeper continued ‘with a brutal homily about the stern necessity for dealing with law breakers according to their deserts’.¹⁸³

Gregory, however, does not present her audience with a one-sided argument when we consider the diverging opinions and reactions of the two women.¹⁸⁴ In light of such intricacy, Mary Cushin’s keen presents a grim counterpart to the rejoicing with which the play ends:

What way will I be the Monday and the neighbours turning their heads from the house? The turf Denis cut lying on the bog, and no well-wisher to bring it to the hearth!
What way will I be in the night time, and none but the dog calling after you? Two women to be mixing a cake, and not a man in the house to break it!
What way will I sow the field, and no man to drive the furrow? The sheaf to be scattered before springtime that was brought together at the harvest! (*CPII* 8)

Whilst it does incorporate aspects of grievance in relation to being ostracized by the community with no one offering help and ‘neighbours turning their heads’, the young widow bemoans primarily the lack of a male partner and not just the absence of communal support. Thereby, her disparagement of the possibility of justice in Ireland becomes more complex. Cathy Leeney notes that ‘implicit in the social emphasis of her complaint is her recognition of the prejudicial power structure in which she and her child must live’.¹⁸⁵ Her chief concern is her family – her son and daily life. Such aspects of immediacy and practicality are outside the realm of nationalist ideology, whereby Mary Cushin’s criticism is directed at both the British judicial system as well as self-sacrificial nationalism.

¹⁸² ‘The Abbey Theatre: Two new Irish Plays’, *The Freeman’s Journal* (23 October 1906), p. 10.

¹⁸³ *The Irish Independent* (22 October 1906), p. 7.

¹⁸⁴ For a detailed analysis of the two discourses in light of the tradition of the *caoineadh* see Leeney, *Irish Women Playwrights, 1900-1939*, pp. 29-32.

¹⁸⁵ Leeney, *Irish Women Playwrights, 1900-1939*, p. 30.

With such proclamations, Mary Cushin can be seen as a precursor to Sean O’Casey’s female heroines such as Mrs. Boyle in *Juno and the Paycock*.¹⁸⁶ Arguing with her son Johnny about principles, Mrs Boyle tells him that ‘you lost your best principle, me boy, when you lost your arm; them’s the only sort o’ principles that’s any good to a workin’ man’.¹⁸⁷ Johnny, who lost his left arm and injured his hip during the Easter Rising, is an example of the destructive forces of republican, self-sacrificial nationalism in O’Casey’s play. Mrs. Boyle bears the brunt of the hardship as the sole breadwinner of the family and she does not buy into Pearsean grandiloquence:

JOHNNY. Ireland only half free’ll never be at peace while she has a son left
to pull a trigger.

MRS. BOYLE. To be sure, to be sure – no bread’s a lot better than half a loaf.¹⁸⁸

Thus, both Mary Cushin and Mrs. Boyle are primarily motivated by necessity rather than by nationalist ideologies which complicates a nationalist reading of *The Gaol Gate*.

However, the play ends with Mary Cahel’s keen. Denis’s mother had already expressed her sentiment in her comment: ‘Better for him have killed the whole world than to give any witness at all!’ (CPII 8). It is implied that the worst that can befall a family is to have an informer among them. Once she finds her son to be innocent of informing, irrespective of any other criminal involvement he might have pursued, she rejoices, ‘*Holding out her hands*’, and celebrates his heroism: ‘Did they ever hear in Galway such a thing to be done, a man to die for his neighbour?’ (CPII 10) This stands in juxtaposition to Mary Cushin keening and lamenting on the steps of the gate for her loneliness, hardship and grief. Denis becomes a local hero, whilst Terry and Pat are dismissed for their cowardice. As we never hear Denis speak and we only get a mediated perception through his next of kin and the gatekeeper, his

¹⁸⁶ Terence de Vere White hints at Lady Gregory’s possible influence on O’Casey’s play when claiming that ‘The last speech in “The Gaol Gate” is far too close to the famous threnody in “Juno” to be purely a coincidence’. See Terence de Vere White, ‘The Old Lady Said Yes!’, *The Irish Times* (6 March 1971), p. 8.

¹⁸⁷ Sean O’Casey, *Three Plays: Juno and the Paycock, The Shadow of a Gunman, The Plough and the Stars* (London: Pan Books, 1980), p. 27.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

ideological motivation for keeping silent remains shadowy. Anne Fogarty asserts, ‘His silence may be more a result of clannish loyalties than of political conviction’.¹⁸⁹ Yet it was the play’s ending of the old woman’s mythologizing keen that guaranteed its positive response among nationalists. Following *The Gaol Gate*’s premiere on 20 October 1906 at the Abbey Theatre, *The Freeman’s Journal* positively commented that ‘into that one act is thrown an all but infinity of the deepest pathos’.¹⁹⁰ The play was staged 170 times between 1904 and 1932 at the Abbey, which made it Gregory’s seventh most staged drama, and its theme of rejection of British law in Ireland and martyrdom would account for its revival at pivotal moments of Irish history such as the hunger strike in 1920.¹⁹¹

When discussing the programme for the Abbey’s tour in 1907, Gregory was awake to the tension between an intended, literal meaning of a play and its performance value in a historical context and in a particular locality. Considering the programme for her native County Galway, Gregory stated that ‘I particularly didn’t wish to have *Gaol Gate* there in the present state of agrarian excitement, it would be looked on as a direct incentive to crime’.¹⁹² She feared that her plot would be an incitement to ignore British law. The heightened concern is unsurprising in the aftermath of the *Playboy* riots earlier in the year which demanded a ‘positive critical re-enforcement’.¹⁹³ While Yeats and Synge wrote about settings from which they were removed, Gregory was presenting the society and locality of her immediate neighbourhood which turned her, in the case of a negative response, into an easy target. Thus when William Fay decided, without her consultation, to put the ‘political tragedy’ on the programme for the Abbey tour in 1908, its author objected.¹⁹⁴ However, the play was staged for five nights in January 1908 in Galway, and her concern was reflected in her comment to

¹⁸⁹ Fogarty, “‘A Woman of the House’”, p. 117.

¹⁹⁰ ‘The Abbey Theatre: Two new Irish Plays’, *The Freeman’s Journal* (23 October 1906), p. 10.

¹⁹¹ <http://www.abbeytheatre.ie/archives/search/plays/gaol%20gate/> Accessed 24.06.2013.

¹⁹² Gregory to Yeats (26 December [1907?]), Folder 756, Berg.

¹⁹³ Roche, Anthony Roche, ‘Lady Gregory: the Politics of Touring Ireland’, in Nicholas Grene and Chris Morash (eds), *Irish Theatre on Tour* (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2005), p. 52.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

Yeats that she ‘could not ask “the classes” to come’ as it was ‘such a nationalist programme’.¹⁹⁵ On 9th January, Synge noted to Molly Allgood that ‘It is queer that Lady G. hasn’t turned up’.¹⁹⁶

Gregory’s ability to empathise with and understand the complexity of Irish society is understood as the great strength of the one-act tragedy. Even the *Irish Times* would comment more positively on a revival of *The Gaol Gate*, produced in a bill with Sean O’Casey’s *The Shadow of a Gunman*, in September 1928 that ‘It made one hopeful for the future of Irish theatrical culture to “feel” last night’s packed house experiencing the full intensity of the anguish and the exaltation that our distinguished Irish woman writer has concentrated into so short, but so perfect, a play’.¹⁹⁷ Frank O’Connor, who was managing director at the Abbey in the late 1930s, offered high praise in claiming that *The Gaol Gate* ‘makes everything else written in Ireland in our time seem like the work of a foreigner’.¹⁹⁸ Although an overstatement, O’Connor’s comment hints toward the dichotomy between Gregory’s background as a Protestant landlord and her overt sympathies for the Irish country people and the cause of Irish nationalism. It was noted more recently ‘That a woman of her lineage and background could so acutely portray the native Irish hatred of British law and of informers, and so vividly dramatize the glorification of a man who has protected the murderers of a landlord or his agent, testifies strongly to her sympathetic understanding’.¹⁹⁹

The play’s contemporary reception, although positive among a nationalist audience, was nonetheless low key, despite its continued topicality. Especially following the revolutionary years after Easter 1916, the interaction between Irish and British law became a fertile subject. The Abbey’s financial situation deteriorated in the aftermath of the Rising, in

¹⁹⁵ Gregory to Yeats (8 January 1908), Folder 154, Berg; see also Roche, ‘The Politics of Touring’, p. 63.

¹⁹⁶ John Millington Synge to Molly Allgood (9 January 1908), in Ann Saddleier (ed.), *The Collected Letters of John Millington Synge – Volume Two, 1907-1909* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), p. 129.

¹⁹⁷ *The Irish Times* (18 September 1928), p. 4.

¹⁹⁸ Frank O’Connor, *The Backward Look – A Survey of Irish Literature* (London: Macmillan, 1967), p. 191.

¹⁹⁹ Cólín D. Owens and Joan N. Radner (eds), *Irish Drama 1900 – 1980* (1990; Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2000), p. 31.

part due to curfews. The aesthetic, rather than political, agenda of the theatre's programme could no longer sustain the enterprise and, from 1918 onwards, the directorate 'was to create a more politically engaged theatre'.²⁰⁰ Inspired by the hunger strike at Mountjoy prison by twenty eight prisoners in demand for the category of political prisoners, Yeats considered a revival of his play *The King's Threshold* as the 'present hunger strike may give it actuality'.²⁰¹ Notably, in December 1919, Yeats had written to Gregory: 'If you do any play of mine while I am away avoid "Kings Threshold" in which the chief player is so long on the stage that he is monotonous unless he have great emotional variety'.²⁰² With MacSwiney's hunger strike, the 'emotional variety' would almost come naturally. On 27 September 1920, Yeats wrote to Gregory: 'I shall give it the tragic end it has always needed and make some other changes. [...] If I can come down we would talk over the chance of good performance'.²⁰³ Yeats smelled a profit. As Paulin shows, the publication of Yeats's poem 'Easter 1916' on 23 October 1920 in the *New Statesman* – three days before MacSwiney's death – is no coincidence; the poem stands as much as a reflection of the events of the Rising as it does of the hunger strike.²⁰⁴

Despite such an astute awareness and political manoeuvring regarding the publication and staging of particular works, neither the Abbey's directorate nor the Dublin audience appear to have realized the potential of Gregory's play. *The Gaol Gate* had been revived on 17 August 1920 – only five days after the arrest of the Lord Mayor of Cork – with six

²⁰⁰ Lauren Arrington, *W.B. Yeats, the Abbey Theatre, Censorship, and the Irish State: Adding the Half-Pence to the Pence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 23.

²⁰¹ William Butler Yeats to Lady Gregory (18 March 1918), *CL*.

²⁰² William Butler Yeats to Lady Gregory (27 December 1919), *CL*.

²⁰³ William Butler Yeats to Lady Gregory (27 September 1920) quoted in Tom Paulin, 'Yeats's Hunger-Strike Poem', in Tom Paulin, *Minotaur: Poetry and the nation state* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), p. 144.

²⁰⁴ Paulin, 'Yeats's Hunger-Strike Poem', p. 150. To add to the link between 1916 and MacSwiney's hunger strike in 1920: Yeats - questioning in 'Man and the Echo' (1939) whether 'that play of mine send out / Certain men the English shot' – attributes a prophetic note to his work that he not only applied to *Cathleen ni Houlihan* which he had co-written with Gregory. Writing to Olivia Shakespear in late 1922, he notes: 'I wrote "Kathleen-ni-Houlihan" when Ireland was entirely at peace & "The Kings Threshold" before anybody had hunger-struck'. William Butler Yeats, *The Poems*, ed. by Daniel Albright (London: Everyman, 1994), p. 392; Yeats to Olivia Shakespear (7 November 1922), *CL*.

performances in a bill with Oliver St John Gogarty's *The Enchanted Trousers* and Gregory's comedy *The Jackdaw*. Noting 'a large and appreciative audience', the *Irish Times* acknowledged that *The Enchanted Trousers* 'with its play on Castle rule, has a keen edged appeal at the present moment'. No such political reading was applied to *The Gaol Gate* which was 'a simple, passionate piece [...] which almost vibrated upon the heartstrings of the audience'.²⁰⁵ Considering the return receipts of £184.15.7 for the week of 17 to 21 August, the bill was a success.²⁰⁶ Yet despite the notable financial profit, *The Gaol Gate* disappeared from the Abbey's stage. The allegorical potential of the play, however, was realized in France.

In September 1920, the play was produced in 'one of the salons of this quiet neighbourhood', Boulainvilliers, near Paris. *The Irish Independent* reported that 'French people have been so impressed by the grim determination of the Irish hunger-strikers that the moment was considered opportune for producing "La l'orte de la Prison" ("The Gaol Gate")'.²⁰⁷ The background scenery formed a painting of Mountjoy prison, thus transforming the setting from Co. Galway to Dublin. Staged during the War of Independence, this revival has to be understood in the context of the arrival of the Black and Tans in March 1920, and the hunger strike of sixty republican prisoners detained in Mountjoy the following month, demanding prisoner of war status. At the time of production, Terence MacSwiney was in the middle of his hunger strike in Brixton Prison, whilst another group of republican prisoners refused food in the Lord Mayor's hometown, Cork. 'A single word in denunciation of his comrades would have set Denis at liberty', the review continued, 'but he conserves a heroic

²⁰⁵ 'The Abbey Theatre', *The Irish Times* (18 August 1920), p. 4.

²⁰⁶ In the following year by comparison, MacSwiney's *The Revolutionist* brought in £173 from 24 to 26 February 1921. Abbey Theatre Account Book April 1920 to March 1925, Abbey Theatre, Dublin. I am grateful to Lauren Arrington for her generosity in sharing her research findings.

²⁰⁷ *The Irish Independent* (18 September 1920), p. 4. *The Gaol Gate* proved to be particularly popular with French audiences as it is noted in September 1928 that 'the interest in the Irish Theatre has proved so general that another Parisian theatre, the Sorbonne, is now arranging for the presentation of "The Gaol Gate".' See 'France and Lady Gregory', *Weekly Irish Times* (29 September 1928), p. 4.

silence which, eventually, costs him his life. [...] Denis Caël was no traitor; he died, as he lived, an Irish patriot'. With great admiration for Denis's self-sacrifice, the review declares him a hero of Irish nationalism. The parallels to the hunger strikers are apparent; with one single bite, they could save their lives. Yet through their patriotism they refuse – in silence – to recognise the legitimacy of the law. The act of keeping silent, or refusing food, is an indictment of the British system of justice in Ireland. Referring to 'a momentary silence' at the end of the play, it is reported that:

the applause burst forth, and one could see that it was meant for those heroic prisoners who preferred death rather than dishonour, and, in spirit, they wandered back to the Dublin streets in those tragic days of April to participate in the recitation of the Rosary and join in the prayers for the dying.

As 'Ireland is becoming more and more the question of the hour', Gregory's play resonated with contemporary nationalist sentiments.²⁰⁸

Gregory herself strongly empathised with the fasting Terence MacSwiney as she wrote that his 'long dying makes me suffer. I read the service for "a sick person", though there seems but little chance of his recovery, night and morning, and have ordered the Abbey to be closed should he die, but that is little to do'.²⁰⁹ Here, the hunger strikers' personal tragedy and suffering is extended to those outside the prison, foreshadowing Gallagher's theatrical analogy of 'the world [...] has become the audience'.²¹⁰ It is the mode of silent suffering that appealed to Gregory's romantic idealization of self-sacrifice. She wrote in the late nineteenth century:

We who are above the people in means & education ought, were it a real famine, to be ready to share all we have with them, but that even supposing starvation was before them it would be for us to teach them to die with courage [rather] than to live by robbery.²¹¹

²⁰⁸ *The Irish Independent* (18 September 1920), p. 4.

²⁰⁹ Entry for 11 September 1920, *Journals I*, p. 186.

²¹⁰ Gregory later reviewed Gallagher's book *Days of Fear* and thought it 'will be one of the great books of the world'. See Entry for 13 November 1928, *Journals II*, p. 337.

²¹¹ Gregory quoted in Arrington, W.B. *Yeats, the Abbey Theatre, Censorship, and the Irish State*, p. 4.

When we consider MacSwiney's comment, 'It is not those who can inflict the most, but those that can suffer the most who will conquer', Gregory's empathy for both Denis Cahel's self-sacrifice and MacSwiney's hunger strike stems from her own ideological belief that violence turned inwards is to be seen as heroic.²¹² Equally, MacSwiney's 'Fenian élitism' – prevalent in such comments as 'to prove us worthy of a noble line, to prepare us for a great and noble destiny' – must have appealed to the playwright's own class consciousness.²¹³ Gregory's prayers for the Lord Mayor were 'to Him "with whom do live the spirits of just men made perfect, after they are delivered from their earthly prisons"'.²¹⁴ She later included MacSwiney in her ballad in celebration of Irish rebels entitled 'The Old Woman Remembers' as 'Terence, who waned, while moons grown old / Thrice gazed on an unconquered man'.²¹⁵ The character Denis Cahel thus could have been equally included in this list of felons who have raised the profile of the fight for Irish nationalism. The link between the two becomes apparent when the news of MacSwiney's death reminded Gregory of Mary Cahel's line in *The Gaol Gate*: 'It was not a little thing for him to die, and he protecting his neighbour!' (CPII 10). Privately, Gregory acknowledged the contemporary potency of her play, but not as a director of the Abbey.

She considered MacSwiney's death as a sacrifice for his fellow countrymen; "'Punch" had a caricature of "The Irish Volunteer army" that degraded type that helped the bitterness in the land war and before', she noted, 'I felt the Lord Mayor had not given his life in vain if even to contradict that, for his portrait must be also in those Dublin papers; it is, they say[,] in

²¹² MacSwiney quoted in David W. Augsburger, *Conflict mediation across cultures: pathways and patterns* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), p. 79. The quote resurfaced prominently in the context of the 1981 hunger strike in Northern Ireland. See Paulin, 'Yeats's Hunger-Strike Poem', p. 142.

²¹³ Paulin, 'Yeats's Hunger-Strike Poem', pp. 142, 143.

²¹⁴ Entry for 24 October 1920, *Journals I*, p. 195.

²¹⁵ Lady Gregory, 'The Old Woman Remembers', quoted in Coxhead, *A Literary Portrait*, p. 215. Notably, MacSwiney's death was described in the press as a 'bloodless conquest'. See 'A Fitting Tribute', *Sinn Féiner* (15 November 1920), p. 2, quoted in Reynolds, *Modernism, Drama, and the Audience for Irish Spectacle*, p. 135. Lucy McDiarmid proposes that this poem 'is *Kathleen ni Houlihan* without any expressions of ambivalence about martyrdom, *Gaol Gate* without the sharp, passionate, changeable emotion of Mary Cahel. It is Young Ireland poetry written by Old Ireland'. McDiarmid, 'The Demotic Lady Gregory', p. 226.

all the American ones'.²¹⁶ This stands in contrast to Denis Cahel's death in *The Gaol Gate*. His body is retained within the confinements of the prison grounds and the family was unable to host a wake for him. Denis's sacrifice was celebrated and spread throughout the community by word of mouth and through speech. He had sacrificed his life for a good name. MacSwiney's sacrifice, by contrast, was linked to a higher cause and a more deliberate political statement. As he had no audience within Brixton Prison, apart from his comrades, his sacrifice needed a different staging. His audience was 'without the gates'.²¹⁷ As compellingly demonstrated by Reynolds, it was MacSwiney's body that 'held an important role' as 'it was the body itself that displayed the injustice of the English government'.²¹⁸ On 15 November 1920, Gregory received a letter from Una Pope-Hennessy in which her friend wrote in sadness: 'You could not see the face of that man in his coffin, looking like the face of a starved child of 10, without feeling the most awful moral wrong had been done – It overwhelmed you'.²¹⁹

The Abbey directorate put on Terence MacSwiney's *The Revolutionist* in eight performances starting on 24 February 1921 and a revival of seven performances in October, capitalizing on the hunger striker's recent death.²²⁰ When Mrs MacSwiney attended the performance on 25 February, Gregory 'told her with what pride we gave this play for the first time, that we felt we were laying wreath upon the grave'.²²¹ In return, the hunger striker's play provided the Abbey with financial profit as Gregory, regarding the theatre's accounts, noted: 'we can play on for the present without borrowing, though we have dropped about £150 a quarter. But last week's £170 on Lord Mayor's play should help to reduce this'.²²² In October, a year after MacSwiney's death, she remarked: 'Pride must have a fall and I had

²¹⁶ Entry for 30 October 1920, *Journals I*, p. 196.

²¹⁷ Mitchell, 'The Imprisonment of Wilfrid Scawen Blunt', pp. 91-92.

²¹⁸ Reynolds, *Modernism, Drama, and the Audience for Irish Spectacle*, p. 148.

²¹⁹ Entry for 15 November 1920, *Journals I*, p. 201.

²²⁰ <http://www.abbeytheatre.ie/archives/search/plays/the%20revolutionist/> Accessed 21.05.2012.

²²¹ Entry for 25 February 1921, *Journals I*, p. 228.

²²² Entry for 27 February 1921, *Journals I*, p. 228.

been rather proud [...] of having lent the theatre and the Players for a Sunday performance for Republican Prisoners' dependents'.²²³

Gregory's attitude toward governmental enforcement of law and order and British judiciary was complex, as demonstrated in *The Gaol Gate*. In the immediate aftermath of the executions of the leaders of the Easter Rising, she wrote to Yeats on 14th May:

The Government gave over their own business to soldiers, & they will suffer for that stupidity. I don't think so far they have been harsh in the country – at least in the places I know. They carried off a great many prisoners for trial, but [...] police evidence is not to count against them without the evidence of civilians, or evidence found in their own possession. I wish there could have been a display of force – yet I mustn't forget that there have been brutal murders & wrongdoings in these last years, when no one was brought to book, & it is right to break the power of terrorizing gangs while[?] it can be done.²²⁴

On the one hand, she was appealing to Eoin MacNeill as a representative of those executed leaders 'to give full testimony as to the plan, the project, in which they had put their faith' and exposed her romantic ideal in posing the question 'for is it not the custom in Ireland as in tragedy for the victory to remain with the dead?'.²²⁵ On the other hand, she confessed to Blunt that 'I don't know if [the executions] were necessary from an English point of view – probably they were – But I grieve, because these men were more akin to us than the politicians'.²²⁶ Foster suggests that 'her attitude towards the world that centred on Gort was notably less nationalistic than her stance in Abbey matters'; and apparently less than her plays demonstrated.²²⁷ However, as republican nationalism gained momentum, the British judicial system came increasingly under scrutiny and Gregory's position less ambiguous.

While the directorate did not appear eager to capitalise on Gregory's own exploration of the clash between British and Irish law, despite its relevance during the revolutionary

²²³ Entry for 18 October 1921, *Journals I*, p. 303.

²²⁴ Lady Gregory to W.B. Yeats (14 May 1916), Folder 495, Berg.

²²⁵ Lady Gregory, 'What was their Utopia?', Typescript of essay, with author's ms corrections, signed and dated, 16 May 1916, p. 6, Berg.

²²⁶ Lady Gregory to Wilfrid Scawen Blunt quoted in R.F. Foster, *W.B. Yeats – A Life, Vol. II. The Arch-Poet 1915-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 48-49.

²²⁷ Foster, *A Life II*, p. 48.

years, the play, again, became highly topical with the outbreak of the Troubles in Northern Ireland and the deployment of British troops in August 1969 as well as the introduction of internment on 9th August 1971. Both *The Irish Times* and the *The Irish Independent* published reports by detainees, smuggled out of prison, which exposed the brutality of the British forces. Due, perhaps, to the publication of the four volumes of Gregory's plays as part of the Coole Edition by Colin Smythe in March 1971, it was re-considered for production. *The Gaol Gate* was revived, after more than 25 years of absence on the Abbey's stage, by director Vincent Dowling with 18 performances in November 1971.²²⁸ As curtain-raiser to Sean O'Casey's *The Shadow of a Gunman*, 'Lady Gregory's long neglected "Gaol Gate" [was] rendered acutely topical by recent events'.²²⁹ Noted in a review by Godfrey Fitzsimons, the setting was changed again – this time to South Armagh. Proving highly relevant to contemporary Irish society more than 50 years after its premiere, 'the voices of Bernadette McKenna, Kathleen Barrington and Harry Brogan were pointedly Northern, with the result that, while the offence of the young man is never spelled out (though it appears non-political), the feelings vented in "Gaol Gate" had a moving aptness to present reality in the North'.²³⁰ When considered in light of the parallels to MacSwiney's hunger strike and Gregory's belief that his sacrifice 'has made it unnecessary for any other prisoners to protest through hunger strike', it seems curious that the play did not see a revival in 1981.

'Is it a turncoat you are?': *The Wrens* (1914)

The incompatibility of loyalty to one's country and a concern for one's daily life is most strongly presented in Gregory's one-act play *The Wrens*. Reading about the passage of the Act of Union of 1800, she was inspired to write a play that – set in January 1799 – 'imagines

²²⁸ http://www.abbeytheatre.ie/archives/production_detail/4139 Accessed 21.05.2012.

²²⁹ 'What's on in the arts: Theatre', *The Irish Times* (1 November 1971), p. 12.

²³⁰ Fitzsimons, 'Abbey at the Gaiety', *The Irish Times* (1 November 1971), p. 10.

the losing of a vote that would have at least made the numbers equal, through so slight a cause as a quarrel between two strolling vagabonds, that disturbs the attention of a servant from watching the moment to call his master, who would have cast his vote against the Bill'.²³¹ Yet the key theme is not the passing of the bill as such, but rather the quarrel over loyalties between the vagabonds and the effects the union will have on their individual lives. The married couple of the Hevenors present the opposing political sides in their attitudes to the bill. In the first draft of the play, dated 4th February 1914, Gregory outlines that 'She hopes [the bill] will be thrown out. He hopes not'.²³² Thus, the wife is a 'Nat[ionalist]' while the husband is an 'Orangeman'.²³³ During the course of the play, the husband is persuaded to take a pledge of temperance until the bill is defeated which he is made to believe will happen on that day. The wife, in consideration of her husband's temperance, reconsiders her political allegiance. Consequently, Gregory stated in her holograph notes: 'Wife turns from Nationalism to sing for Orangeism, that the bill may pass. Husband turns from Orangeism to sing for Nationalism that the bill may be thrown out'.²³⁴ The emphasis on the change of loyalty in both these characters is exemplified by her note of 'Where are his principles? Where are her ones?'.²³⁵

The theme, once again, was topical. Under the premiership of H.H. Asquith's Liberal Government, the third Home Rule bill was introduced in Parliament in April 1912. The imminent reality of some measure of Home Rule and the militarisation of Irish society with the formation of the Ulster Volunteer Force and the Irish Volunteers in 1913 provided the matrix for Gregory's critically neglected play.²³⁶ Written between February and March 1914,

²³¹ Lady Gregory, *The Image and Other Plays* (New York/London: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1922), pp. 251-252.

²³² Lady Gregory, *The Wrens*, 11 p. of holograph notes, 4 February 1914, Berg.

²³³ Gregory, *The Wrens*, 11 p. of holograph notes, 7 February 1914, Berg.

²³⁴ Gregory, *The Wrens*, 11 p. of holograph notes, 9 February 1914, Berg.

²³⁵ Gregory, *The Wrens*, 11 p. of holograph notes, 4 February 1914, Berg.

²³⁶ In light of the introduction of the Bill in 1912, Gregory wrote to Shaw: 'One is not afraid of R.C. intolerance, for as I quote from Cuchulain "Good as the attack is the defence will be as good", but one might as well say there will be no whiskey'. Lady Gregory to G.B. Shaw (30 November 1912) in Dan H. Laurence and Nicholas Grene (eds), *Shaw, Lady Gregory and the Abbey* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1993), p. 84.

it was finished only a few months before Home Rule was enacted on 18 September but subsequently suspended for the duration of the war. The passing of the Act of Union offered the opportunity to interrogate the contemporary conflict, on a national and personal level. The rebellion of the United Irishmen of 1798 confirmed Ireland's unstable situation and gave rise to the necessity of direct control.

However, the ruling elite of the Protestant Ascendancy, comprising Henry Grattan's Parliament as established in 1782 that granted Ireland some measure of legislative independence, looked unfavourably toward unification as its members feared the demise of their supremacy. For Catholics, on the other hand, the union was seen as the paving stone for Emancipation. This complexity was initially sought to be incorporated into the play, as Gregory wrote in the notes dated 12th February that the husband was to be Catholic and for the union, 'because of Emancipation being given', and the wife to be Protestant and against the union because of her support 'for Grattan' and 'the real patriots'.²³⁷ Contemporary unionists' opposition to Home Rule, expressed in 1912 with the signing of the Covenant, the introduction of amendments to the Home Rule bill in regard to the exclusion of Ulster and the formation of the Ulster Volunteer Force, was reminiscent of the political tensions of the late eighteenth century.

It is noteworthy that *The Wrens* can be placed among Gregory's literary responses to Home Rule from the 1880s to the early twentieth century, a progression which, according to Scott Boltwood, moved from 'vocal opposition' to 'her ultimate recognition of its political inevitability in the mid 1900s'.²³⁸ William Gladstone's introduction of the first Home Rule Bill in 1886 caused great anxiety, revealed by Gregory's diary entry for 29 May 1886: 'Great

²³⁷ Gregory, *The Wrens*, 11 p. of holograph notes, 12 February 1914, Berg.

²³⁸ Scott Boltwood, "'I Kept Silence For Good or Evil": Lady Gregory's Cloon Plays and Home Rule', in Scott Boltwood (ed.), *Renegotiating and Resisting Nationalism in Twentieth-Century Irish Drama* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 2009), p. 34.

fear now that the bill will pass'.²³⁹ As the bill was thrown out by the Commons, she rejoiced in its defeat: 'Gladstone beaten by thirty, isn't it delightful!' Gladstone, she remarked, was 'abhorred [...] as the enemy of [the landlords'] order', and for her it was 'the land question and not the political one [that] is the thing to be looked into'. In her chapter on 'Gladstone and Ireland' in *Seventy Years*, Gregory quoted a letter from Lord Dufferin to Sir James Stephens on the defeat of Home Rule: 'had it gone the other way I and every Irishman in my position would have been completely ruined, though that would have been an insignificant result in comparison with the ruin of the country itself'.²⁴⁰ This utilitarian attitude would be echoed by Gregory once Home Rule entered the political debate again in 1893, the year after her husband's death.

Writing to Sir Henry Layard in April, she expressed relief that her son, Robert, was too young to be concerned by contemporary politics:

He is happily too young to know of the Home Rule threat held over us. The Bill took ones breath away at first, such a measure having been even brought into being and discussed as if possible seemed an outrage. But our courage is getting up now, all Unionists here are full of fight & all the enthusiasm on our side - & no class really welcomes the proposal now they have seen it in black & white.²⁴¹

The sense of insecurity, in part exacerbated by her recent widowhood and sole responsibility as landlord of Coole until her son would come of age, was repeatedly emphasized, noting again in September that 'we can't feel quite happy or secure while the Home Rule Bill is in the air'.²⁴² Her attitude toward some measure of Irish independence was strong enough to inspire a political pamphlet titled *A Phantom's Pilgrimage: or Home Ruin*. A phantom, representing Gladstone, returns to Ireland ten years after the implementation of Home Rule in order to judge the outcome of 'self-government on an oppressed nation'. Convinced that Home Rule had saved the Irish 'from tyranny and serfdom', Britain's Prime Minister finds

²³⁹ Entry for 29 May 1886, Diary, Berg.

²⁴⁰ Gregory, *Seventy Years*, pp. 74, 56, 74, 65.

²⁴¹ Lady Gregory to Sir Henry Layard (3 April 1893), Folder 2, Berg.

²⁴² Lady Gregory to Sir Henry Layard (11 September 1893), Folder 2, Berg.

the country in ruins. Ireland has become thinly populated, 'sub-divided' with 'uncultivated' land and 'deserted' homesteads, poverty rife in both towns and countryside, famine-stricken farmers, begging labourers, neither workhouses nor employment, and murdered priests. The only option, for those with the resources, is emigration. A farmer's wife puts 'the curse o' the country [...] on the Home Rule, an' on them that gave it to us!'²⁴³ Despite its unionist politics, the main focus is on the fate and deprivation of the peasantry which is described with empathy.

The impact of Home Rule on the landed class is only given in a short interlude. What once was a Big House is now a 'dilapidated' mansion with 'uninhabited stables and cattle sheds'. Through their obsession with tradition and heritage, the gentry have dug their own grave. 'I did not like to give up my father's home', one landlord says, 'I thought it was my duty to stay here, and now it is necessity that has kept me, since little by little we have lost all'.²⁴⁴ This encapsulates Gregory's own concerns at the time. As custodian of a highly mortgaged estate, it was her continued wish to maintain the Gregory tradition and keep Coole for her son. With lively memories of the Land War of the 1880s and nationalism gaining momentum, a prerequisite was peaceful and collaborative relations between the classes in Irish society. Echoing Lord Dufferin's comment, she wrote to Blunt in December 1894 in reference to the recent land reform: 'I suppose they will reduce some more of us to pauperism, but it will at all events put what is taken from us into the tenants pockets, and not be like Home Rule which cd ruin everybody so I have not the same feeling of animosity against it' – a rather utilitarian view.²⁴⁵

Through her extensive reading and research on Irish history as part of her editorial project to publish her husband's grandfather's letters in the winter of 1894/5, Gregory started

²⁴³ Lady Gregory, *A Phantom's Pilgrimage*, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Gregory Family Paper, Lady Gregory Papers, Emory University. Hereafter cited as Emory. I am grateful to James Pethica for granting me access to this transcript.

²⁴⁴ Gregory, *A Phantom's Pilgrimage*, Emory.

²⁴⁵ Lady Gregory to Wilfrid Scawen Blunt (9 December 1894), Folder 25, Berg.

to develop a more and more critical view of Anglo-Irish relations. She noted in her diary of 1897 that, being accused of a tendency to Home Rule by Sir Frederic Burton, ‘No, not to Home Rule but I defy anyone to study Irish history without getting a dislike and distrust of England’.²⁴⁶ It was particularly James Anthony Froude’s *History of the English in Ireland in the Eighteenth Century* that, Gregory claimed, ‘has opened my eyes to the failings of landlords, & I may say of *all* classes in Ireland’.²⁴⁷ Such comments indicate her gradual move towards Irish nationalism, yet it is problematic to assume that this conversion was, as suggested by James Pethica, complete by 1896 – the year in which she met William Butler Yeats, for the second time, and became involved in the Irish Literary Revival.²⁴⁸ Gregory’s well-known statement of 1900, the year in which she had published ‘The Felons of Our Land’, that ‘I am not working for Home Rule, only preparing for it’ stressed a preparatory aspect that is concerned, perhaps, more with the practical effects of partial independence on daily life rather than an ideological alignment.²⁴⁹ Thus, by the turn of the century, her nationalism was still rather reserved. By 1908, however, she was in favour of Home Rule, despite it being for, once again, rather practical reasons. Writing to John Quinn in February 1908, she outlined: ‘I cant imagine why any landowner shd support the English connection, & I think they are beginning at last to see it. Wd not Home Rule be better than mob rule – moonlighting rule?’²⁵⁰ Her reservation strikes one as being at odds with the republican sympathies expressed in both *The Gaol Gate* and *The Rising of the Moon* in which law breakers are mythologized and lionized. Yet when it came to her own property, a state of law and order was preferred – no matter whether a Dublin or a London parliament putting that in place.

²⁴⁶ Entry for [1897], Diary, p. 58, Berg.

²⁴⁷ Gregory quoted in Pethica, ‘Introduction’, *Diaries*, p. xxii.

²⁴⁸ Pethica, ‘A Dialogue of Self and Service’, p. 133.

²⁴⁹ Lady Gregory to Wilfrid Scawen Blunt (22 November 1900), Folder 27, Berg.

²⁵⁰ Lady Gregory to John Quinn (26 February 1908), Berg.

With the Parliament Act of 1911, the road towards Home Rule was cleared as the House of Lords' veto power was removed. Gregory, whose reading in 1911 included George Trevelyan's *American Revolution*, was inclined to compare the Irish situation with that of eighteenth-century America. She expressed what Judith Hill terms 'a romantic attitude' towards impending Home Rule in a letter of March 1911 to John Quinn.²⁵¹

What a wonderful making of a nation! A peaceful separation - a "limited Home Rule" would never have hardened dependants with rulers as those battles did. The creeping in little by little of self government here, tho' better than leaving things as they are will not even excite the imagination, as battles do, or as a sudden tremendous scheme like Parnell's would have done.²⁵²

The demand for politics to 'excite the imagination' is reminiscent of Gregory's celebration of Irish ballads and, in part, the inspiration behind her own literary output. With its hint toward revolutionary rather than moderate politics, the playwright's nationalist sympathies come to the fore, but merge with the echoes of personal concerns in regard to her class's status and property exemplified in *The Wrens*.²⁵³

Set outside the Parliament in Stephen's Green, the play opens with the Porter's proclamation: 'Arguing and debating, Lords and Commons, through night and through dawn, till they have the world talked upside down' (*CPI* 179). As in *The Gaol Gate*, the setting is outside a building representing law and authority. Whereas the prison is a location where one resides after the law has been applied, here it focuses on the building in which the law is made. Upon the arrival of Kirwan's servant, it is quickly established that his master is against the union, thus is his servant. Kirwan, confident that the bill will be thrown out, has returned to an attorney's office to attend to the post and has asked his servant to call him back for the vote. 'Though it's likely his one vote won't be hardly needed', Kirwan's servant says, 'with all that will be against the bill' (*CPI* 180). This already hints toward the outcome of the play

²⁵¹ Hill, *Lady Gregory*, p. 245.

²⁵² Lady Gregory to John Quinn (11 March 1911), Berg.

²⁵³ Lady Gregory, *The Wrens*, in Lady Gregory, *The Collected Plays, I, The Comedies*, ed. Ann Saddlemyer (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1979), pp. 179-191. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *CPI*.

where, indeed, the vote is taken without Kirwan and the bill passes the House of Commons by one vote. With the arrival of Lord Castlereagh's servant, the debate about the advantages and disadvantages of the union begins (*CPI* 180).

With this dialogue between servants of members of parliament, the argument starts on the macro-level of public politics where the two characters mirror their master's attitudes:

KIRWAN'S SERVANT.	It will be a better day inside an hour's space, when the bill for the Union with England will be defeated and thrown out. [...]
CASTLEREAGH'S SERVANT.	If it is it will be because there's more fools than wise men within the walls of that house.
KIRWAN'S SERVANT.	It is what you're thinking that your master has the whole country bought. But let me tell you that he has not. It would take a holy lot to do that!
CASTLEREAGH'S SERVANT.	There is no person having sense but would wish to be within the Empire of England.
KIRWAN'S SERVANT.	He would not, unless he would come of a bad tribe and a bad family, and would be looking for a pension for his vote. [...]
CASTLEREAGH'S SERVANT.	There is no one against the bill but some that are like yourselves not having learning and that don't travel.
KIRWAN'S SERVANT.	There are, and noble and high-blooded people are against it! Languaged people that can turn history to their own hand! (<i>CPI</i> 180-181)

Castlereagh's servant, although not explicit, argues that self-evidently Ireland profits from its place within the British Empire in condescendingly insinuating that all those against the bill lack knowledge. The Empire, it is implied, provides education and, with its cosmopolitanism, offers travel and opportunities. The proclamation that 'it is better & more civilized for Ireland to have [the] Union', as noted in the holography notes, did not make it into the final version.²⁵⁴

²⁵⁴ Gregory, *The Wrens*, 11 p. of holograph notes, 7 February 1914, Berg.

Kirwan's servant, in contrast, refers to the contested method of 'buying' votes. Gregory thus incorporated a topic that was decisive among nationalists. She had already recorded in the *Kiltartan History Book*, published in 1909, rural people's attitude toward the Act. 'As to the Union', she quoted, 'it was bought with titles. Look at the Bingham and the rest, they went to bed nothing, and rose up lords in the morning'.²⁵⁵ Lord Castlereagh, who was Chief Secretary under William Pitt, struggled for votes in the House of Commons as Protestants were unwilling to give up their supremacy. Thus, 109 votes were given against a viceregal address regarding the union on 24 January 1799 whilst 104 voted for it. Exemplifying the division in parliament, different techniques had to be adopted including patronage: 'Patronage that would normally have been spread over a decade was concentrated within one year and devoted to one purpose – the construction of a unionist majority in the Commons'. Henceforth, honours were distributed in addition to the creation of 16 peerages and 15 promised promotions alongside pensions. Those opposed to the union 'were dismissed from office' and England launched a propaganda campaign in the press and pamphlets.²⁵⁶

Although it has to be acknowledged that these practices were not unusual at the time and not solely applied in the case of Ireland, it was a contested aspect of the Act of Union that appealed to nationalist sentiments. To underline this aspect of corruption and bribery in the play, Gregory promptly has Castlereagh's servant shaking a purse of money in front of the Porter, appealing to him as 'It would be best for you while you have time shift over to our side' (*CPI* 180). 'Someway foreign money doesn't go far', the Porter, who figures as a neutral character who carefully weighs up the arguments, replies (*CPI* 180). He challenges the certainty that the bill will make it through: 'There was no great strength in the wrens that destroyed Ireland the time they went picking crumbs on a drum, and wakened up the army of the Danes' (*CPI* 181). While Kirwan's servant jokingly refers to 'a couple of raggedy

²⁵⁵ Lady Gregory, *The Kiltartan History Book*, with illustrations by Robert Gregory (Dublin: Maunsel, 1909), p. 22.

²⁵⁶ Alvin Jackson, *Ireland 1798-1998* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), p. 25.

strollers' as the possible upset to 'the liberties of Ireland that day', Margy and William Hevenor, disputing over the state of their poverty, enter the stage (*CPI* 181) and soon after, husband and wife join in the debate over the pros and cons of the bill. While Hevenor resides with Castlereagh's servant in support of the bill, Margy aligns herself with Kirwan's opposition to it.

Hevenor, representing the educated Catholic's position toward the Act of Union, announces his support for the bill: 'Sure the Government have [the Bishops and the Clergy] promised that the Parliament to change over to London, there'll be Catholic Emancipation on the minute!' (*CPI* 182). 'What did my own Bishop put down in Mayo?', Hevenor continues, "Let us join," says he, "with the British," says he, "that are the wisest, the freest and the happiest people on the whole face of the earth!"' (*CPI* 182). The clergy's support for the Union, as it was viewed by the rural Irish in the early twentieth century, is described as follows in the *Kiltartan History Book*:

And it is what I heard from the old people, there was no priest in Ireland but voted for it, the way they would get better rights, for it was only among poor persons they were going at that time. [...] It was their vote sent the Parliament to England, and when there is a row between them or that the people are vexed with the priest, you will hear them saying in the house in Irish "Bad luck on them, it was they brought misfortune to Ireland".²⁵⁷

Writing the play with the benefit of hindsight, Kirwan's servant's and Margy's opposition to Hevenor's argument refers to the delayed implementation of Catholic Emancipation in 1829. 'I wouldn't believe it from the Pope', Kirwan's servant proclaims and Margy adds 'England is all promise and no pay' (*CPI* 182). While Hevenor is convinced that Emancipation will bring about equality between Protestants and Catholics, his wife contests the notion: 'All the laws of England would not make you equal of myself! I never will give in to be reduced to a Catholic!' (*CPI* 183). Margy further implies that priests acted out of their own fear rather than because of a political belief in the benefit of the union when she states that the Bishop 'is

²⁵⁷ Gregory, *The Kiltartan History Book*, p. 22.

but in dread of corner boys like yourself joining strikes and setting themselves up against the Pope the same as those lads out in France' (*CPI* 182). Particularly the latter comment suggests that the clergy shared Britain's fear of revolutionary politics, inspired by the French Revolution.

Hevenor's support for the union between Ireland and Britain arises from his belief in its economic benefits of free trade. '[W]e'll be full and easy like themselves', he announces, and both countries will be 'sharing wealth the same as the children of one house' (*CPI* 182, 183). Writing retrospectively, Gregory may cater toward nationalist narratives in regard to the sixth and seventh article of the Act of Union concerning finance and commerce which were considered 'the most controversial aspects of the measure'. Article six established that Britain's taxes on exports to Ireland and selected imports would be removed, yet Ireland was still to be taxed, although to a lesser degree than previously, on foreign manufactured goods until 1826. With article seven, the Irish contribution to British revenue would be increased significantly to 'two-seventeenths of the total', resulting in a tremendous debt burden in the aftermath of the Napoleonic wars.²⁵⁸ Although the historiography suggests that the wars had a much greater effect on Irish economy and welfare than the Act of Union, in contemporary terms the subject was highly decisive, particularly in consideration of the post-Famine period.

The latter view is exemplified by Margy's comment that 'England will get the cream and leave us the broken milk' which 'will give the country no fair play' (*CPI* 182, 183). Gregory had shown an interest in the financial relations between Ireland and Britain in an undated outline of 'Questions and Answers'.²⁵⁹ This dialogue, written in a notebook, was probably inspired by the Financial Relations Report of the 1890s which had revealed that Ireland had been overtaxed by £2,740,000 per annum.²⁶⁰ 'We do not ask benevolence',

²⁵⁸ Jackson, *Ireland 1798-1998*, p. 26.

²⁵⁹ Lady Gregory, 'Questions and Answers', [n.d.], Berg.

²⁶⁰ See D. George Boyce, *Nineteenth Century Ireland – The Search for Stability*, New Gill History of Ireland 5, rev. ed. (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2005), p. 230.

Gregory wrote, ‘but justice’. In a bitter tone she asserted that ‘The dog has not only been fed on his own tail, but has been forced to sit up and beg for each separate morsel of it. But now there is no more tail to eat!’ She accused the British Government of destructive policies: ‘first the loyal Protestant traders of the last century. Then the Church you had established – now the landlords. At last you are all but face to face with the people’. Following the revelation of Ireland’s heavy overtaxation – ‘found not by “hysteric Celts” but by level headed English Statisticians’ – Britain commissioned a new investigation into the matter. ‘The late commissions are supposed to have looked at it through glasses of too green a tint’, Gregory sarcastically noted, ‘And the new one, even if forced to the same logical conclusions will, it is hoped, chose spectacles of another shade’.²⁶¹ Demonstrative of her awareness that the narrative of Ireland’s position within the United Kingdom, as well as Irish history, could differ greatly depending on political allegiances, this was a lesson she had already learned in the Egyptian encounter. In contemporary terms, the third Home Rule bill of 1912 ‘contained a highly ungenerous definition of financial autonomy’.²⁶²

The following dialogue thus had a contemporary relevance with its reference to the debate of constitutional versus militant nationalism as well as unionism’s armed resistance:

- MARGY. With what sort is it you are wishful to mingle and join, after God Himself putting out His hand to banish snakes and serpents out of Ireland?
- HEVENOR. There is plenty of that class in it yet ready to ate one another.
- MARGY. We might ate one another at some times, but [the English] ate the whole of us!
- HEVENOR. Too much of quarrelling and slandering. It is time for us live in peace.
- MARGY. Ah, for ten thousand years Ireland was fighting and what would ail her to stop at this time?
- HEVENOR. It is the power of England will put down your pride, and the law of the Union passed.
- MARGY. If they do pass it no one would be forced to obey it. It is a good man said that.
- HEVENOR. Them that said it will be put down as rebels.

²⁶¹ Gregory, ‘Questions and Answers’, Berg.

²⁶² Jackson, *Ireland 1798-1998*, p. 163.

MARGY. It is rebels in good clothes will be put down that time in place of rebels in frieze. It is all rebels we'll be together, the Lord be praised! I tell you I to suckle 20,000 sons, I'd rear them the same as Hannibal! (*CPI* 183)

Margy's revolutionary politics present the impossibility of a legislative state of equality and peacefulness, due, in part, to the opposing narratives fostered over centuries. Her proclamation to give birth to Ireland's future rebels taps into the iconography of Ireland as the oppressed woman who has to free herself, reminiscent of Yeats's and Gregory's play *Cathleen ni Houlihan*.

Margy is further linked to revolutionary politics through her upbringing. She tells the MPs' servants that 'it's in the shadow of a Protestant house I was reared, and a good house' (*CPI* 184). Gregory places her female character not in any Protestant household, but specifically in the immediate vicinity of the Duke of Leinster, Lord Edward Fitzgerald (1763-98), an admirer of the French Revolution and a key figure in the 1798 rebellion who was shot in the shoulder upon arrest and died shortly after from the consequences of his wound. Celebrated for his self-sacrificial martyrdom, this Protestant aristocrat stood for a type of nationalism Parnell represented in the late nineteenth century; the type Gregory praised for its ability to 'excite the imagination'. As a fellow member of her class, Lord Edward represented to Gregory her class's contribution to revolutionary Ireland:

God be with my poor Lord Edward, the best that ever ate the world's bread! It's often she roasted an egg in the ashes for him and he in his young age. It is for himself she's wearing a black ribbon on this day, tied around the frill of her cap. It's myself will sing him through the three parishes. (*CPI* 184)

Lord Edward Fitzgerald's sister, Lucy Fitzgerald, published an 'Address to Irishmen' in the aftermath of his death in prison in which she stated that 'Without ambition he resigned every blessing this world could afford to be of use to you, to his Countrymen whom he loved better than himself, but in this he did no more than his duty; he was a Paddy and no more; he

desired no other title than this'.²⁶³ Parnell, 'turning his back on class, caste and fortune', would follow into this tradition of Protestant aristocratic nationalism.²⁶⁴ Both Gregory's admiration for Parnell as well as her emphasis on duty and responsibility offer an explanation for her incorporation of Lord Edward Fitzgerald.

We have already seen Gregory's preference for the incorporation of Irish ballads in reference to 1798 in *The Rising of the Moon*. With Margy's republican sentiments as expressed in the following song, Gregory reflected the contemporary militarisation of Irish politics:

We'll arm ourselves for God is good and blesses them who lean
On their brave hearts and not upon an earthly king or queen;
And freely as we lift our hands we vow our blood to shed
Till in some day to come the green will flutter o'er the red! (*CPI* 184)

Whereas Irish ballads functioned in *The Rising of the Moon* as a reminder of a common cultural heritage that creates strong bonds among the Irish through its collective memory, their ideological meaning is dismantled in *The Wrens*. Margy and William Hevenor are referred to in the listing of the play's characters as 'strolling singers' and, more importantly, this had been further specified in an early draft of the play as '2 ballad singers' (*CPI* 179).²⁶⁵ On their approaching the House of Commons, they see the MPs' servants, identified by their 'rich clothes' as 'grand people' with the prospect of some money, mingling on the steps. Margy encourages her husband to 'word out a Government song' with the prospect of receiving some money (*CPI* 181). Hevenor launches into 'A song for Britain and her sons', yet is dismissed by Kirwan's servant as disloyal, as he sings 'but for profit and gain' (*CPI*

²⁶³ Lucy Fitzgerald, 'Address to Irishmen' (1798), in Angela Bourke et al, *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing Vol V, Irish Women's Writing and Traditions* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2001), p. 59.

²⁶⁴ Foster, *Paddy and Mr Punch*, p. 41.

²⁶⁵ Gregory, *The Wrens*, 11 p. of holograph notes, 7 February 1914, Berg.

182). Hevenor's response, 'Why wouldn't I go with the bishops and clergy?', proposes that political allegiances can be adopted according to personal gain and profit (*CPI* 182).²⁶⁶

Hevenor's 'Government song', as demanded by his wife, presents a stark contrast to the actuality of the play:

A song for Britain and her sons,
A song of harmony,
And now and ever let it breathe
Of truth and loyalty.
Its theme the same where'er we be,
Her palace isle we'll sing,
The laurels and the victory
Of Britain and the King! (*CPI* 182)

As the audience has just witnessed the dialogue in regard to Britain's tactics of coercion in bribing the MPs to vote in favour of the bill, the praise for Britain's 'truth and loyalty' is challenged. It is assumed, as no origin of this ballad could be traced, that Gregory wrote it herself which draws further attention to its sarcastic tone in the context of the play. In another song, Hevenor praises the benefits of the imperial link between Britain and Ireland:

United with Britain may Erin for ever
In commerce, in arts, and in science advance;
United with Britain may Ireland for ever
Live mighty and free, independent of France! (*CPI* 186)

The reference to independence from France is in particular contrast to Margy's celebration of the 1798 rebellion which was to be supported by the French. The lyrics, constituting the final four lines of 'French News', are to be found in a contemporary collection edited by a 'Patriot' and entitled *The Patriot's Vocal Miscellany; or a Collection of Loyal Songs*, published in 1804.²⁶⁷ In ascribing the ballads the potential to arouse and incite political allegiance, Castlereagh's servant encourages Hevenor to continue his balladry to great political purpose: 'I'll get you good custom for your songs. You'll be of use to me, coaxing and turning rebels

²⁶⁶ This also hints toward the church's political involvement and, in particular, the influence of clergy on public opinion. Gregory's critical attitude of the clergy will be explored in Chapter Two.

²⁶⁷ Anonymous, 'French News', in 'Patriot', *The Patriot's Vocal Miscellany; or a Collection of Loyal Songs* (Dublin: Printed for the Booksellers of Ireland, 1804), pp. 15-17.

to the side of my master' (*CPI* 185). Thus ballads are regarded as propaganda to influence or – as explored in *The Rising of the Moon* – change public opinion. In fact, Margy and William Hevenor communicate their positions by singing these songs to one another. William Hevenor's 'victory of Britain and the King' is answered by Margy's 'down with the orange and blue! / Out with Castlereagh and Pitt and the Union!' (*CPI* 188).

At first, it seems that nothing could cause the wife's commitment to waver, yet the play takes a turn when Castlereagh's servant hands over some money to Hevenor for his 'good verse for the Union' (*CPI* 184). 'Do not give it to himself but to me!', Margy pleads, 'Everything he will handle he will drink' (*CPI* 184). Introducing private concerns into the world of public politics, Gregory chooses an aspect of Irish life that was also a prominent part of the imperial stereotype: the Irishman as drunkard. William Hevenor, we are told by his wife, regularly takes to drinking, 'To make a trade of it he does', and finds his most joyful moments in the public house (*CPI* 185). She acknowledges it as an addiction when stating that once 'they get themselves into a habit it is hard for them get out of it after!' (*CPI* 184). Linked to this proneness to drink is life on the margin of Irish society, travelling on the road with little money.

Castlereagh's servant encourages Hevenor to take the pledge and Kirwan's servant agrees: 'live peaceful with the good woman at your side' (*CPI* 185). Although Hevenor admits that he would 'fail [...] to hold to it', it is suggested, sneeringly by Kirwan's servant, that he only adheres to it until the bill is thrown out which, it is assumed, will be in 'a few hours' (*CPI* 185). This, of course, undermines the idea of a temperance pledge as he would immediately make his way to the public house as by the time he reaches it, the bill will be defeated and he can take to drinking again. 'That much is not worth while', Margy says, but Hevenor, in order to spite his wife, agrees to it. The Porter returns with a book from within the House of Commons and takes Hevenor's pledge, with the latter repeating the words: 'I

will touch no drop of drink, or anything you'd call drink, until such time as the Union bill now within in that house will be thrown out and rejected and beat! So help me God!' (*CPI* 186).

Yet once taken, and asked to continue his song as he received some money for it, Hevenor finds he cannot sing anymore and he claims he would need 'a small drop of porter' (*CPI* 186). He realizes that through the pledge he has given up the only thing he enjoys in his life and cannot think of any other way to spend his money than on drink: 'I to be bare empty I would say nothing, but wealth to be in my hand and there to be no frolic or pleasure in it, it is that is killing me entirely' (*CPI* 187). For Margy, it is a moment of great opportunity that has the potential to change both their lives as she believes he can use the money 'in some better way' (*CPI* 187). At this moment, their political allegiances are tested according to their principles and both realize that their personal needs are greater and of more consequence than those of their country. Kirwan's servant wins Hevenor over:

KIRWAN'S SERVANT.	Ah, what are you making such lamentations over. You have but to hold to your promise till the Bill is cast out and that time will be short.
HEVENOR.	That it may be so!
CASTLEREAGH'S SERVANT.	What's that you're saying? Sure you're on the side of the Union.
HEVENOR.	I am not. It is of my own emancipation I am thinking.
CASTLEREAGH'S SERVANT.	Is it a turncoat you are?
HEVENOR.	I amn't condemning anyone down, but I wouldn't give an inch of your toe for the man would let anything interfere with his own liberty. (<i>CPI</i> 188)

Private concerns and loyalties thus win over national loyalties. Although Margy is initially appalled by her husband's traitorous politics, implying that political allegiances should not be easily shaken and proclaims that she 'would not do a thing of the sort' but rather 'walk honest and walk pure', she changes sides. This is not because her politics have changed in their core belief, but because her primary concerns are her husband and home rather than her country:

CASTLEREAGH'S SERVANT.	You fool of a woman! Don't you know the English bill to be cast out your man's pledge is swept along with it.
MARGY.	I was forgetting that.
CASTLEREAGH'S SERVANT.	Pitt and the Government to get their way on this day, he is bound and tied to temperance and has the life pledge taken.
MARGY.	In earnest?
CASTLEREAGH'S SERVANT.	A sober man and a quiet man at your side.
MARGY.	And the little house I'd have? And the pincushion?
CASTLEREAGH'S SERVANT.	What's to hinder you? (<i>CPI</i> 188)

Despite her scepticism, as 'he'll be turning to it again, and the pledge loosened, as sure as there's folly in a fool', she now sings '*up* with the orange and blue!' instead of 'Out with Castlereagh and Pitt and the Union!' (*CPI* 188). As with Hevenor, she is similarly shunned by Kirwan's servant who tells her to 'Shut your traitor mouth! [...] To go join with them that would send Ireland to the slaughter!' Akin to her husband's response, Margy proclaims that 'It is not Ireland I have in charge. [...] Isn't it better to me Parliaments to go to wrack in the clouds than my man to go live blazing drunk!' (*CPI* 189) While Hevenor's change of mind, caused by his fondness for drink, provides the play with more stage-Irish characteristics, Margy's concern gives the one-act play a more serious tone. The pre-eminence of their life in poverty was at the forefront of Gregory's mind in drafting the play, as she remarked in her holograph notes: 'Servant says her children wd be growing up free. She says what use is freedom & they starving'.²⁶⁸ The playwright, therefore, was pondering the theme of nationalist ideology in particular and political ideologies in general as well as their immediate effects on every-day life. 'She is sad about fall of country [...] but her husband is worth more to her', Gregory noted.²⁶⁹

The play ends with husband and wife having changed their political standpoints, Hevenor, now singing 'The Shan Van Vocht' – in echo once again of revolutionary

²⁶⁸ Gregory, *The Wrens*, 11 p. of holograph notes, 7 February 1914, Berg.

²⁶⁹ Gregory, *The Wrens*, 11 p. of holograph notes, 12 February 1914, Berg.

nationalism and rebellion with a nod toward *Cathleen ni Houlihan* – and Margy praising the union (*CPI* 189-190). Yet, neither of them changes sides due to political conviction whereby their support, voiced through ballads, render these ideologically empty. With their dispute, they distracted the officials, and Kirwan's servant missed the bell for the vote to be taken, consequently not calling on his master to return for the vote. Through this distraction, the quarrelling couple, ironically, secured the passing of the bill to implement the Act of Union. The stage directions at the end of the play instruct for '*Rule Britannia*' to be played off stage and the Union Jack to be put up on Parliament in Stephen's Green after the 'Green Flag' was put down, and '*More cheers inside; and groans from the street*' (*CPI* 191). Hevenor bemoans his future life of abstinence, 'I have never enjoyed a worse day' (*CPI* 191). Margy, however, has the last words:

No, but the best day ever came before you. We'll have great comfort in the bye-and-bye and a roof to put over the child. You'll be running down drink from this out, the same as the fox and the cherries. Give me now that money where you will not put it astray on me this time. (*CPI* 191)

Considering the rather pro-Union ending of the play with only an off-stage moan, it is not surprising that *The Wrens* did not open, and has in fact never been staged, at the Abbey Theatre where it might have been considered 'too contentious'.²⁷⁰ Although Margy's decision and want for a better life would have found a sympathetic audience, the nationalist political rhetoric emphasised that the national question must be given priority over all others.

In addition, the portrayal of the Irish people in *The Wrens* had the potential to cause offence. Not only do we encounter poverty and deprivation, but also the stereotype of Irish drunkards who are incapable of self-government. This view, it has to be noted, is rather overtly referred to by Gregory who has Margy describe her husband as 'So wild and arch as he is he's no good for the world only drinking' (*CPI* 185). There is an underlying implication that Irishmen are incapable of running an independent Ireland. The woman's concerns reside

²⁷⁰ Hill, *Lady Gregory*, p. 275.

within the private sphere of the home rather than the public sphere; a portrayal which would have offended feminist Irishwomen such as Hannah Sheehy-Skeffington, Maud Gonne and Constance Markievicz. Yet William Hevenor is not only prone to too much drinking, but also to violent behaviour, the two being inextricably linked:

HEVENOR. If I had but thought to take my fill before they knocked a promise out of me. Music that would be going a-through me, and a poet's wreath around my head! Kindness in my heart that I would forgive the whole world, and it after thrusting me from its door!

MARGY. It is fighting it would be more apt to leave you.

HEVENOR. It might – the drink is very lively. Attacking colour sergeants and officers and generals! And I have but a little wattle of a stick and they with all the guns of Buonaparty! (CPI 187)

As in *Spreading the News*, *The Rising of the Moon* and *The Gaol Gate*, violence lurks beneath the surface and is a constant possibility. Indeed, as in *The Rising of the Moon*, violence is addressed toward those representing the establishment. It reflects, to a degree, Gregory's own prejudiced view that is at times in keeping with the imperial stereotype. However, as she explores those aspects of violence and drink in the context of its impact on family life, she might also be seen to interrogate key concerns in Irish society, thereby providing social commentary rather than imperial justification.

The ambiguity of the play was not lost on its English audience. When staged by the Abbey Company at the Court Theatre in London in June 1914, attended by Gregory as she was staying at Hugh Lane's house in London, the review in *The Times* was promisingly titled 'Lady Gregory's New Play: A Study of Political Motives'. The commentary, however, remained aloof. Despite the proclamation that the play 'has a sharp sting in it' the reviewer stated that 'we should not care to guess exactly in which direction its shafts are aimed'.²⁷¹ Indeed, a contested reception of the play was anticipated by the author herself when she noted:

²⁷¹ 'Lady Gregory's New Play: A Study of Political Motives', *The Times* (19 June 1914), p. 10.

it is likely she would be praised by moralists, but the common people would put their curse upon her and him as they have put it on the even less responsible Wrens that lost Ireland a victory through awakening the Danish sentinels by pecking at the crumbs upon their drums.²⁷²

Acknowledging that Margy Hevenor was her primary concern, Gregory was aware that a Dublin audience, 'the common people', would disagree with the woman's priorities. With the outbreak of the First World War and its arising questions of loyalties, together with the delay of Home Rule and militarisation of both nationalism and unionism, the play could have incited strong reactions. What the play demonstrates is an acute questioning of the motivations behind political ideologies as well as the effects of politics on workaday life, a theme that was already central to 'Arabi and His Household' and *The Gaol Gate*.

The shift in Gregory's drama can be attributed to vital changes in her own life at the time of writing *The Wrens*. Once land purchase was made compulsory with the Land Act of 1909, Gregory's differentiation between the land question versus Home Rule of the 1890s no longer held sway. Both bills had interweaving consequences at Coole Park, as she and her son Robert entered into a long process of negotiations with the Congested Districts Board about the sale of Coole in the aftermath of the act of 1909. The Board had made an offer of £43,264 for the tenanted (3277 acres), untenanted land (1653 acres) as well as the demesne and house (1353 acres) in December 1912 which would have provided them with a profit of £13,638. However, the Gregorys declined the offer and accepted a much less attractive one, that excluded Coole demesne and house, in December 1914, pressured by the fact that tenants had not paid rent since May of that year.²⁷³ Their estate, once covering over 5000 acres, was now reduced to 1353 acres. Thus, personal concerns regarding her family's heritage, in addition to more strained relations between her role as landlord and her tenants, prompted Gregory to reconsider the ramifications of politics. Only two months after the staging of *The*

²⁷² Gregory, *The Image and Other Plays*, p. 252.

²⁷³ Hill, *Lady Gregory*, pp. 276-277.

Wrens in London, the outbreak of war added to her personal concerns as Robert wished to enlist, yet was initially hindered because of the negotiations of the sale. The play, Kohfeldt proposes, ‘seems to have been written out of a premonition of that decision’.²⁷⁴ Although Gregory was determined not to influence her son either way, she appeared relieved for Robert to have escaped the dangers of warfare. She wrote to Quinn on 4 August 1914:

Robert all but joined the army and started off, and is much inclined to do so still, but it is an anxious time here as well, and he may be wanted more at home. I told him I had such confidence in his right judgement I would say nothing for or against, at least nothing of my personal feelings.²⁷⁵

Robert enlisted in September 1915 and lost his life in January 1918. Through the compulsory land purchase and the outbreak of war, the direct effects of politics, questions of loyalties and militant conflict had made their way into the drawing room at Coole. Gregory was, therefore, particularly concerned with the implementation of political ideology and its impact on daily life.

By the end of the war the politics of the Irish Parliamentary Party were succeeded by Sinn Féin. The War of Independence, with its Black and Tan atrocities and hunger strikes, were of vital influence on Gregory’s move toward republican nationalism. ‘[A]n old idea came to mind’, she recalled on the day following the proclamation of the truce of the Anglo-Irish War in July 1921 when journeying on a train from Dublin to Coole, ‘of making a poem about the rebellions from century to century, an old woman lighting a candle for the leader of each’ (*CPII* 360). Her poem titled ‘The Old Woman Remembers’, finished on 4th September and referred to as ‘only doggerel’, features a Cathleen ni Houlihan figure commemorating both well and lesser known rebels including Donall O’Brien, Phelim O’Connor, Shane O’Neill, Robert Emmet, Patrick Sarsfield, the 1916 leaders, Terence MacSwiney and Kevin Barry.²⁷⁶ Yeats granted it ‘some charm’ and, when finally staged at the Abbey Theatre recited

²⁷⁴ Kohfeldt, *The Woman Behind the Irish Renaissance*, p. 243.

²⁷⁵ Lady Gregory to John Quinn (4 August 1914) quoted in Pethica, ‘Yeats’s “perfect man”’, p. 21.

²⁷⁶ Entry for 1 September 1921, *Journals I*, p. 289.

by Sarah Allgood on 31 December 1923, it received positive reviews.²⁷⁷ *The Freeman's Journal* emphasized its strong nationalist appeal by describing it as a poem 'of traditional Irish patriotism'.²⁷⁸ *The Irish Statesman* commented: 'The emotion rises to intensity in the last verse, where a passionate appeal for union and peace is made to all who love Ireland, however diversely their love may have manifested itself'. Indeed, the latter response echoes Gregory's own understanding of the poem as 'a little paving stone on the road for peace' at the end of the Irish Civil War.²⁷⁹ Whilst a new verse for the end, written in September 1923, emphasized that 'The barren shadow-weapons fall, / The bitter battle angers cease',²⁸⁰ the published version in *The Irish Statesman* of March 1924 re-focuses on peace:

This is our Rosary of praise;
 God make us worthy all our days
 Of those who gave up life and ease
 To win us a long day of peace! (*CPII* 361)

'The Old Woman Remembers' attests to Gregory's republicanism of the 1920s and represents the result of her strong interest in Irish nationalist songs and ballads since adolescence, exemplified in both *The Rising of the Moon* and *The Wrens*. The changing of the order as she proclaimed it in the 1890s in 'Our Boys in India' had taken place and, by the 1920s, she was willing to accept it, and Margy Hevenor's republicanism no longer had to take second place. Whilst she was keen in 1920/21 to obscure her nationalist sympathies with the anonymous publication of six articles on the Black and Tan atrocities in her neighbourhood in *The Nation*, by the end of the Irish Civil War she appeared more openly political and was promptly reminded of where her class's loyalties should reside. Yeats wrote to his wife on 9

²⁷⁷ The poem was published in both *The New Republic* (20 February 1924) and *The Irish Statesman* (22 March 1924).

²⁷⁸ *The Freeman's Journal* (1 January 1924), p. 6.

²⁷⁹ Entry 8 September 1923, *Journals I*, p. 477.

²⁸⁰ Entry 6 September 1923, *Journals I*, p. 475.

April 1924: ‘This morning Lady Gregory received a most violent anonymous letter from some unionist denouncing her for writing “The old Woman Remembers”’.²⁸¹

By the 1920s, Gregory was used to criticism regarding her work. It was ironic, however, that such continuous concern was voiced regarding a poem in praise of Irish martyrs. This brings us back to Gregory’s article ‘The Felons of Our Land’ from 1900 in which she had lauded such poetry she now wrote herself. She quoted a letter from Sir Alfred Lyall in response to the article in her autobiography:

I agree that these verses which you quote have an element of heroic poetry; though they have not the power which affects the world at large, undoubtedly they represent and serve to keep up an intense popular resentment, and it is no use for us to argue that much of it is unreasonable.²⁸²

Lyall’s reference to Irish ‘popular resentment’ against England had – in the aftermath of the Anglo-Irish War – a different resonance. His doubtfulness with regard to poetry’s affect raised a question Gregory addressed in each of the plays discussed in this chapter.

These three plays share an interrogation of the power of songs or words to change opinions, a theme that originated in her letter to *The Times* on behalf of Arabi Bey. Likewise, *The Rising of the Moon*, *The Gaol Gate*, and *The Wrens* centre on questions of imperial jurisprudence and legislation. Gregory’s interrogation and criticism of the politics of imperialism as well as nationalism can be seen in light of her early journalism. In her writings on the Egyptian nationalist movement, the colonial civil servant’s life in India and the practical effects of Home Rule in Ireland, political ideologies are questioned and evaluated according to their impact on private life. Ireland had undergone dramatic change between the 1880s/90s and the 1920s. Likewise, Gregory’s politics and position in Irish society had changed. Yet rather than a conversion from a unionist wife of a colonial diplomat to a widow come nationalist Revivalist, Gregory’s politics fluctuated.

²⁸¹ William Butler Yeats to George Yeats (9 April 1924), *CL*.

²⁸² Sir Alfred Lyall quoted in Gregory, *Seventy Years*, p. 191.

The conflict between public and private politics is a key theme in each of these dramas. *The Rising of the Moon*, *The Gaol Gate*, and *The Wrens* addressed topical themes associated with Empire and the judicial system and their provenance in contemporary politics demonstrated Gregory's timeliness. Despite the popularity among a nationalist audience in the case of *The Rising of the Moon* and *The Gaol Gate*, the textual analysis illustrates no clear or direct alignment with a political cause. Rather, the double or open endings of all three plays indicate Gregory's role as a public moralist in that she encouraged the audience to reflect on their own loyalties and addressed social questions such as poverty, and the hardships of widowhood. As the production histories suggest, however, it is the political context that struck a chord with the contemporary audience.

II

‘In Pilate’s house’: Protestants and Catholics

Irish Ireland is Catholic Ireland. Catholic Ireland is Irish Ireland.¹

- *The Leader* (1901)

The weakness of your position is that nearly all your writers are protestants &, so, liable to get into religious difficulties, partly through not understanding exactly what will + what will not give offence, partly because the Catholic will never quite trust your being really in sympathy with them.²

- Blunt to Gregory (1907)

Sunday service was an important component in Gregory’s life. Notably, Sir William ‘said he would come to church if I would take him to a different one every Sunday’, Gregory remembered in *Seventy Years*. She added: ‘going as I did into a society where intellect was in reaction against dogma, faith in me, as in them, was given a hard knock, was shaken and languished for a while. But for a while only’.³ Whereas Sir William was more of a conformist Protestant, Gregory’s emphasis on church attendance and her continuous engagement with the Bible and its gospels attests to her genuine faith. As such, she was the most orthodox Protestant of the Abbey Theatre’s initial triumvirate of directors.

In the 1880s, Catholicism presented an exotic tourist attraction – a spectacle. In the winter of 1887/88, whilst in Italy, Gregory attended Pope Leo XIII’s Jubilee Mass, viewing from ‘tribune places’. Describing the ceremony in her diary at length, Gregory’s prejudiced view of and emotional alienation from Catholicism becomes apparent:

First we could see the feather fans – and then the white and gold canopy held up on gilt poles – and then, in a crimson velvet chair, the Pope. But the spiritual

¹ *The Leader* (29 June 1901), p. 282.

² Wilfrid Scawen Blunt to Lady Gregory (3 April 1907), Lady Gregory collection of papers, 1873-[1965] bulk (1873-1932). The Berg Collection of English and American Literature, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations, New York City. Hereafter cited as Berg.

³ Lady Gregory, *Seventy Years*, ed. Colin Smythe (New York: Macmillan, 1974), p. 82.

ruler of so much of the earth – the “holder of the keys of Heaven and Hell” – appeared not in the simple garment one associates with saints and angels and with the Saviour and the apostles and those who follow in His steps, but covered, almost concealed, by a golden vestment, given by the ladies of Rome, a gigantic sparkling mitre on his head, his hands laden with rings, that of the Sultan amongst them, the feather fans waving beside him.⁴

Here we find an expression of Protestant disapproval of the perceived pomp and grandeur of Catholicism. When she went to the Vatican to view the Jubilee presents (‘chalices, copes, church furniture, baby clothes, work boxes, sausages, soap, boats, toys, stuffed monkeys’), she dismissively remarked in her journal: ‘what a collection of rubbish about as useful to His Holiness as a pair of boots to a mermaid’.⁵ Already at the end of December, she had expressed her dislike for the riches of the Church as the Pope had received ‘10 million lire worth of money and 30 million in goods’.⁶ By implication, Protestantism is associated with austerity and simplicity, a discrepancy apparent when she commented on Ash Wednesday: ‘the Papists fasted on red and common mullet and oyster vol au vent! While we refused our tough filet de boeuf’.⁷

Yet, she misunderstood to a large extent Catholic doctrine and ritual and commented rather confusedly that ‘the Real Presence was supposed to flash into the wine – he knelt bare-headed’. She was deeply unfamiliar with the ceremony at the Jubilee Mass, judging that the ‘singing was fine – the Mass, to very ignorant eyes, a mummary as usual, the rites looking altogether pagan’. She added: ‘His Holiness himself drinking all the wine that had been consecrated had its ludicrous touch’; to her, the Pope simply overdressed and indulged in alcohol.⁸ In February 1888, accompanied by two acquaintances, Gregory went to the Vatican ‘to the “Beatification” [...] – in reality a private view of the Pope praying to one of the Saints he has newly made, St. Agnes of Spain this time. A great crush and bad

⁴ Entry for 1 January 1888, Diary, Typescript, Part 5, p. 40, Berg.

⁵ Entry for 27 February 1888, Diary, Typescript, Part 5, p. 67, Berg.

⁶ Entry for 29 December 1887, Diary, Typescript, Part 5, p. 37, Berg.

⁷ Entry for 15 February 1888, Diary, Typescript, Part 5, p. 64, Berg.

⁸ Entry for 1 January 1888, Diary, Typescript, Part 5, p. 41, Berg.

management'. She concluded: 'a wasted afternoon – unless it is a gain to feel more indignantly Protestant than ever'.⁹

However, she was nonetheless interested and keen to engage with the Roman Catholic faith. On St Patrick's Day 1888, Gregory and her husband visited St Isidore's College, founded by an Irish Franciscan in 1625, 'to hear Father Nugent preach the Patrick Day sermon':

He [preached the sermon] with great eloquence, giving plenty of blarney to the Irish, both at home and abroad. There were a good many students of the Irish College, wearing shamrocks. He gave wonderful practical words at the end – 'Example is the sum of the Gospel,' telling the Catholics of the higher ranks they are in Pilate's house, and that their conduct is closely watched – but I think it is we Protestants who are in Pilate's house here!¹⁰

This comment exemplifies Gregory's principal religious belief and mantra in life: to be a good Christian meant to set a good example to others; one was judged by one's actions. Linked to this was Gregory's life-long concern for reputation: 'Please God, I may not grow bad, but earn a good opinion from others', she noted in 1891.¹¹ Her reference to Pilate's house offers a twofold interpretation. As a Protestant attending a service in a Catholic Church in Rome, she might be seen to refer to that immediate environment at a particular point in time. It is equally possible that she is thinking of their position as Protestants in Ireland. Either way, the quote encapsulates a sense of unease and a heightened self-consciousness of observation and being judged.

Rather than the Catholic population at large, however, it was the clergy who were perceived as a particular threat. The issue of relations between Catholics and Protestants had been a constant public debate, especially in the aftermath of the Land War. Thus, in September 1890, 'An Irish Protestant' published a letter in *The Times* in which he declared the dismal prospects in case of Home Rule for Ireland. He viewed the Catholic Bishops with

⁹ Entry for 26 February 1888, Diary, Typescript, Part 5, p. 66, Berg.

¹⁰ Entry for 17 March 1888, Diary, Typescript, Part 5, pp. 73-74, Berg.

¹¹ Entry for 25 January 1891, Diary. Typescript Part 6, p. 9, Berg.

their support of John Dillon and William O'Brien as the enemy as they 'have been engaged in a conspiracy "for the purpose of impoverishing and expelling from the country the Irish landlords, who were styled the 'English garrison'." [...] The priest wants to get rid of the Protestant'.¹² A response, titled 'Deprotestantizing Ireland', was published thereafter, written by Sir William Gregory. He objected to the harsh language of 'An Irish Protestant' and admitted that 'our mischievous proselytizing efforts have not been calculated to produce goodwill on the part of Roman Catholics to us Protestants'. He argued:

I absolutely deny that hatred of every Protestant is uppermost in the heart of every priest. I believe their feelings to be identical with those of their lay countrymen, whose object it is to get rid of landlordism, Roman Catholic as much as Protestant, some by an equitable transaction, others by a forcible and iniquitous one.

Sir William's use of 'landlordism' connotes the disagreeable practice of absenteeism, neglect of one's duties and irresponsibility. He went on to outline the amicable relationship he had experienced in Co. Galway, 'a constituency in which Roman Catholic landlords had pretty much as large influence as Protestant'.¹³ In the subsequent exchange, Sir William established the difference between legitimate proselytism as a religious impulse in contrast to hatred for another religious group which would be sectarianism: 'Have we not endeavoured by proselytism to render Ireland more Protestant and more amenable to Protestant influence? But this is not "hatred of Catholics"'.¹⁴ Sir William advocated and presented himself as an example of successful ecumenical effort that was based on tolerance and respect. Only two years later, Douglas Hyde gave his famous speech on 'The Necessity for de-anglicizing Ireland', calling for a return to all things Irish and championing the re-

¹² 'An Irish Protestant', *The Times* (16 September 1890), p. 5.

¹³ Sir William Gregory, 'Deprotestantizing Ireland', *The Times* (23 September 1890), p. 4. Fergus Campbell notes that, in the early twentieth century, 97 per cent of the population in County Galway were Catholic. He further establishes that in the 1870s, that about 200 landowners owned the land of the county. Here, the largest estates were owned by Protestants such as Lords Ashtown, Clanricarde, Clonbrock and Dunsandle. However, 'there were many smaller landlords in the county (the Joyces of Corgary, for instance) who were Catholic'. See Fergus Campbell, *Land and Revolution: Nationalist Politics in the West of Ireland 1891-1921* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 4.

¹⁴ Sir William Gregory, 'Deprotestantizing Ireland', *The Times* (1 October 1890), p. 14.

establishment of Gaelic as the national language.¹⁵ Culture was to take precedence over politics as a unifying force between Catholics and Protestants and all classes.

In this context, Gregory's subscription to service was not only an acknowledgement of a woman's role to family and husband, or a class loyalty, but first and foremost a subscription to philanthropic evangelicalism. As she noted in her journal in early 1929: 'Of what use is any man in the world if he has no mission in it? Christ's life is one long emphasis on the point that in the last analysis, when something has to be done, it is the individual who has to do it'.¹⁶ Within nineteenth-century Protestantism, philanthropy was increasingly the expression of female religiosity and Gregory engaged in philanthropic work from adolescence onwards. Yet in her endeavour to help the poor, she quickly realized that such activities were viewed with a critical eye when it involved Protestant philanthropy in aid of Catholic poverty. Gregory's mother, Frances Persse, and her elder sisters, foremost among them Elizabeth who married into the Shaw-Taylor family, were proselytising in their neighbourhood.

Her family's religion was a sore subject throughout her life. In 1912, Blunt published *The Land War in Ireland* in which he recounts a visit to Gregory's childhood home of Roxborough:

We made other visits too, among them one on Mrs. Persse, Lady Gregory's mother, a fine old lady who talked to us of Jesuit intrigues and Popery generally. [N.B. – Mrs. Persse was a typical Irish Protestant of the old school. Lady Gregory // had had some difficulty in persuading her to receive our visit; she had never had a Papist under her roof before.]¹⁷

It appears from one of Blunt's letters to Gregory that she had voiced her displeasure regarding a passage about her mother's faith. 'I am sorry if I exaggerated the Protestantism

¹⁵ Charles Gavan Duffy, George Sigerson and Douglas Hyde, *The Revival of Irish Literature and Other Addresses* (London: Unwin, 1895), pp. 115-161.

¹⁶ [January 1929], D.J. Murphy (ed.), *Lady Gregory's Journals: Volume Two, Books 30-44, 21 February 1925-9 May 1932* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1987), p. 380. Hereafter cited as *Journals II*.

¹⁷ Entry for 19 June 1888, Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, *The Land War in Ireland; Being a Personal Narrative of Events in continuation of 'A Secret History of the English Occupation of Egypt'* (London: Stephen Swift and Co., 1912), pp. 443-444.

of your family', he wrote to Gregory, 'but I was under the impression that you had yourself told me that your mother had never entertained a Catholic under her roof – You must forgive me for this, and if the volume gets another edition I can add a note in correction'.¹⁸

A month later, Blunt sent along a proposed correction for future editions: 'I hope you will approve of the note [...]. But if you wd like it put otherwise there is still time if you write at once'.¹⁹ Gregory was appreciative: 'I should like it put in, with the little corrections I have added. Such things are of importance over here, where a sort of inquisition is kept up into ones opinions'.²⁰

Two years later, the subject was flagged again when Gregory herself was accused of proselytising the tenants on her family estate by her contemporary George Moore. In an article for the *English Review*, Moore described the Persse family as

never having indulged in anything except a taste for Bible reading in cottages. A staunch Protestant family, if nothing else, the Roxborough Persses certainly are. Mrs. Shaw Taylor is Lady Gregory's sister, and both were ardent soul-gatherers in the days gone by; but Augusta abandoned missionary work when she married.²¹

Gregory immediately wrote a letter to William Heinemann's editor, Sydney Pawling, to prevent the passage being repeated in Moore's forthcoming *Vale* advocating 'This statement is incorrect'. Although she admits that her mother and two eldest sisters 'made no secret of this "proselytism" which was much mixed up with benevolence and charity in those days [...] I myself, the youngest, shrank from any effort to shake or change the faith of others'. Instead, she informs Pawling that her philanthropic work came with the approval of the Catholic Church:

¹⁸ Wilfrid Scawen Blunt to Lady Gregory (24 October 1912), Berg.

¹⁹ Wilfrid Scawen Blunt to Lady Gregory (30 November 1912), Berg.

²⁰ Lady Gregory to Wilfrid Scawen Blunt (2 December 1912), Folder 41, Berg.

²¹ George Moore, 'Yeats, Lady Gregory and Synge', *English Review* (January 1914), p. 175. Yeats advised Gregory to take legal action against Moore's accusation, and both feared that this statement would damage not only her reputation but also that of the Abbey Theatre. Moore apologized to Gregory and agreed to change the passage in future publications. See Lady Gregory to William Butler Yeats 'Tuesday' (20 January 1914?), Berg, Folder 421. William Butler Yeats to Lady Gregory, (c. 6 January 1914), *CL*.

I had been brought up by a Catholic nurse, and had many Catholic friends. Among these were the mother and sisters of so good a Catholic as the late Rt Hon C.T. Redington Chief Commissioner of Education in Ireland. They wrote I remember to a priest who had objected to my gathering some children together to learn needlework, assuring him that the religion of these children would not be meddled with by me, that I had no desire to interfere with the religion of Catholics.

Moore's allegations were potentially damaging for the Abbey Theatre, and Gregory was dismayed by the publication of such accusations that 'might quite possibly cause serious injury to the business'. Particularly in the aftermath of the *Playboy* riots, Gregory wrote, 'an attempt has been made in some Irish papers to class me as an enemy of the Catholic Faith; it has been hinted that I had been and desired to become again, a "proselytiser"; and that I might in this undermine the faith of the players'.²² Moore, who might have relied on the gossip of one of Edward Martyn's servants who thought that Gregory 'was "as bad as the others"', wrote an apologetic letter: 'My intention was merely banter. [...] It is intolerable that you should be persecuted on this subject'.²³ Among other papers, the *Irish Independent* quoted excerpts from Moore's article.²⁴

Gregory's reservations about Catholicism were primarily directed at the system and the hierarchy. When Lord Morris' daughter decided to join a convent, for instance, Gregory noted: 'he looked haggard and was suffering terribly from Lily's desertion of her family for a convent. She was so useful and so much wanted at home, I cannot understand how she could sacrifice her family and how the Church could accept her sacrifice which should bring discredit on the system'.²⁵ She wrote about the incident to Blunt, rather judgingly, that 'it serves him right for not bringing her up a good Protestant like her mother'.²⁶ Such

²² Lady Gregory to Sydney Pawling (5 January 1914), Berg.

²³ Ibid.; George Moore to Lady Gregory (9 January 1914), Berg.

²⁴ 'The New Mr. Yeats – George Moore's Book', *Irish Independent* (3 January 1914), p. 5.

²⁵ Entry for 28 October 1888, Diary, Typescript Part 5, p. 111, Berg.

²⁶ Lady Gregory to Wilfrid Scawen Blunt (n.d., fragment of incomplete letter [1888]), Folder 16, Berg.

commentary is indicative of mild anti-Catholicism.²⁷ Her reasoning becomes clearer if we consider an incident of conversion. In 1921, Gregory dined with Mary Studd who

asked me if I thought the worse of her for having become a Catholic. I said no, she was bound to kick, to make some new departure when her children were off her hands. [...] I said, I, knowing what the bondage of the mind imposed by the R.C. Church is especially in Ireland, I should have blamed her had she, who was free born, put the children into that bondage.²⁸

In this instance, she passed a moral judgment and it suggests that – whereas she was tolerant toward those who converted when grown up – she believed in a superior Protestant upbringing. However, rather than condoning the Catholic faith, her contempt is directed against the system that imposed ‘the bondage of the mind’.²⁹ It is particularly with regard to education that Gregory is dismissive of the Catholic Church. Thus, she denounces the clergy for ‘protesting against books while they give those confessional catechisms to young girls and boys, teaching them things we Protestants in our youth never knew’.³⁰ Her emphasis is on questions of morality and, to her, teaching children of sin reflected the corruption of the Catholic system. Again in 1928, in a discussion about the Censorship bill, she told Yeats that ‘we should proclaim it as a triumph for Protestants – we keeping our intellectual freedom can claim the Bill as a new guarantee of Protestant ascendancy – only we and the Censor will possess the knowledge of good and evil – the courage to taste or test forbidden fruit’.³¹ To Gregory, Catholicism operated to ensure conformity. Protestantism, by contrast, it is suggested, allows for more individualism. Perhaps it is this dichotomy of Catholicism

²⁷ Note here Gregory’s anti-feminism, arguing that a woman’s place is in the home.

²⁸ Entry for 14 May 1921, D.J. Murphy (ed.), *Lady Gregory’s Journals: Volume One, Books 1-29, 10 October 1916- 24 February 1925* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1978), p. 252. Hereafter cited as *Journals I*.

²⁹ Compare Yeats’s comment in a letter to Gregory: ‘I think the one reason of the great bitterness here [in Dublin] is that the priests (I hear this from various people) are getting anxious about the coming of Free Thought in Ireland’. William Butler Yeats to Lady Gregory (3 December 1911), *CL*.

³⁰ Entry for 24 October 1924, *Journals I*, p. 597.

³¹ Entry for 14 October 1928, *Journals II*, p. 326.

with its emphasis on community and Protestantism with its focus on individuality that caused tensions and distrust.³²

Gregory's distrust of the system resulted in a moderate anti-clericalism that was not unusual for the time. In the early 1880s, she remarked in 'An Emigrant's Notebook' that 'in Ireland a Protestant is a Protestant, all sects join hands in face of the common foe, the R.C. priesthood'.³³ Notably, 'the common foe' are not the Catholics, but a specific group of the clergy. In this regard, however, she was equally critical of Protestant clergy as Yeats noted: 'She hates all clergy though she never misses Church & is a great reader of her bible'.³⁴ An illustrative example of her dislike of the clergy can be found in a letter to Yeats. Whilst Gregory was fighting against protestors on one of the Abbey's tours in America, she received help from a Catholic woman, Mrs Schuyler Warren. 'She is bringing another priest to night, to sit in my box', Gregory informed Yeats. She added: '(rather a creepy thought)'.³⁵ Her subdued attitude toward the priests was also expressed in a letter to Blunt. In the aftermath of the *Playboy* riots in 1907, Gregory – as the play's chief defender despite her dislike for it – was no longer allowed by the Nun-Matron of Gort workhouse to entertain the children. Although this saddened her, she wrote: 'it may be a liberation for me. I had often given in in small things to the priests because I said "they let me have the workhouse children" – now I can go straight ahead. It is curious that this break with the priests & people, shd come just at the time of Robert's marriage'.³⁶

The reference to a 'break' suggests previous positive relations between the two communities in the locale. Indeed, Gregory was involved in supporting the local economy.

³² Marianne Elliott, *The Catholics of Ulster: A History* (London: Penguin, 2001), pp. xxxvii-xxxviii; D.W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London/New York: Routledge, 2005), pp. 3-4.

³³ Lady Gregory, 'An Emigrant's Notebook', p. 16, Gregory Family Papers, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Emory University, Atlanta. Hereafter cited as Emory.

³⁴ William Butler Yeats to Olivia Shakespear (21 June 1924), *CL*. Yeats added: 'further-more she is a great prude so far as what others say to her is concerned'.

³⁵ Lady Gregory to William Butler Yeats (15 December 1911), Folder 893, Berg.

³⁶ Lady Gregory to Wilfrid Scawen Blunt (30 September 1907), Folder 38, Berg.

For Potts, George Russell presents the only exception among the ‘Protestant Revivalists [who] show little concern over, or even awareness of, the inferior position occupied by Catholics’.³⁷ However, Gregory also proves herself aware of these issues. She worked hand in hand not only with the Sisters of Mercy, but also with Catholic representatives of the upper class. In an article on ‘Gort Industries’, Gregory praised the efforts by the Sisters at Gort, who tried ‘to revive home or cottage industries’, providing employment, being beneficial on an educational, social and commercial level.³⁸ In March 1898, for instance, she helped alongside Lady Fingall and Lady Morris at the local sales of Gort Industries.³⁹ This exemplifies not only her active support of the Catholic Church and the Catholic community, but also demonstrates the social mixing of the denominations.

Gregory, at various times, also spent extended time at Spiddal House, Lord Morris’s home in Co. Galway.⁴⁰ In the autumn of 1897, Gregory stayed with the former Chief Justice for ten days, indicating a mixed social life among the Protestant and Catholic gentry in the county.⁴¹ The landed gentry socialised in the countryside as well as in the city of London during the social seasons. Thus, Edward Martyn, Lord Morris and George Moore, for instance, met with the Gregorys regularly in the late 1880s. Indeed, the founding of the Irish Literary Theatre attested to such a religious overlap. Gregory stayed at Duras House, Count de Basterot’s home. They were visited by Martyn who was accompanied by Yeats. This mixed socialising indicates that aspects of class were much more potent than aspects of religion and any disparaging comments with regard to the Irish Catholic people must be considered in that context. Yeats noted, for instance, that when he told her that he was going to Dunsany Castle ‘she said “I am very glad, for you need a few days among normal and

³⁷ Willard Potts, *Joyce and the Two Irelands* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000), p. 19.

³⁸ Lady Gregory, ‘Gort Industries’, *The Irish Times* (3 September 1897), p. 6.

³⁹ Entry for 17 March 1898, *Diaries*, p. 180.

⁴⁰ Warwick Gould, John Kelly, and Deirdre Toomey (eds), *The Collected Letters of W.B. Yeats: Volume Two 1896-1900* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), p. 103, n. 8. Again, in the autumn of 1900, Gregory had arranged for another stay at Lord Morris’s. See *Ibid.*, p. 574, n. 1.

⁴¹ Entry for 30 November 1897, *Diaries*, p. 154. See also Entry for 13 October 1900, *Diaries*, p. 282.

simple well-bred people. One always wants that from time to time as a rest to one's mind. They need not be clever. It is one of the reasons why I am going to Lady Layard's''''.⁴² Thus, the upper classes – whether Protestant or Catholic – are not spared from dismissive commentary. Equally, when attending a service at the church in Southwark, she remarked: 'I doubt that the Church Service is fitted for the very poor and ignorant, it goes above their heads'.⁴³ Family would also be critiqued. Gregory's nieces Frances, Geraldine and Gertrude Beauchamp – daughters of her sister Gertrude Persse – stayed at Coole for the summer holidays in 1896.⁴⁴ Gregory had been critical of their upbringing in the 1880s, writing in her diary that they 'are very ignorant of Bible history, and on Sundays have no teaching'.⁴⁵

It is in this context that we should consider some of Gregory's often quoted comments which have led to critics' assertions of a sectarian strand to her character. Gregory's remarks that 'We who are above the people in means & education' and her preference for 'clean water' instead of Yeats's proposed 'baptism of the gutter' indicate a high class consciousness that suggests snobbery and elitism more than anything else. It is the difference between those who inherit furniture and those who have to buy it, to refer to Joseph O'Connor's fictional dialogue between Gregory and Synge. Indeed, the latter was equally class conscious. Writing to his wife Molly Allgood, he made it clear that 'I don't want *my* WIFE to be mixing with Music Hall artists'.⁴⁶ This is linked, as we will explore further in chapter three, to education and upbringing; an education in morals, values, and taste. The Abbey Theatre's mission was an educative, reformist one. Yeats wrote to Gregory in 1901: 'I have always felt that my mission in Ireland is to serve taste rather than any

⁴² [1909], Yeats, *Memoirs*, p. 224.

⁴³ Entry for 27 March 1886, Diary, Typescript, Part 3, p. 20, Berg.

⁴⁴ Entry for 14 December 1896, *Diaries*, p. 117.

⁴⁵ Entry for 7 July 1887, Diary, Typescript. Part 5, p. 1, Berg.

⁴⁶ J.M. Synge to Molly Allgood (20 August 1907) in Ann Saddlemyer (ed.), *The Collected Letters of John Millington Synge – Volume Two, 1907-1909* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), p. 36.

definite propaganda'.⁴⁷ Gregory, in turn, at one point was dismayed that Arthur Sinclair was touring with 'poor plays about Ireland – & we could give him good ones. Those poor plays are probably half the cause of vulgar acting - & are educating the audiences in vulgar tastes'.⁴⁸ Taste, for Gregory, was associated with the upper classes as she informed Yeats: 'Taste, like every other attribute of aristocracy, requires daring'.⁴⁹

When Gregory made her by now famous statement – inspiring Tóibín's book title for *Lady Gregory's Toothbrush* – that 'It is the old battle between those who use a toothbrush & those who don't', it can be seen in reference to taste and class consciousness. Those who use a toothbrush are the ones who have taste; they belong to the upper classes. The letter continued: 'Robinson probably uses one, but they probably think he doesn't, all they know of him being that he is from Cork'.⁵⁰ Gregory's reference to Lennox Robinson, who had become manager and director at the Abbey following Synge's death in 1909, indicates that the toothbrush is not a marker between Protestants and Catholics, Robinson being a Protestant himself. It is notable that such comments occur, predominantly, in the context of clashes between the Abbey's directors and the theatre's audiences.

To withstand objections from the majority and hold up the flag of virtue of taste is, for Gregory, a courageous act. She asserted, with regard to Edward Martyn, that 'These RC's haven't the courage of a mouse, and then wonder how it is we go ahead'.⁵¹ Madeleine Humphrey dates the letter to the period 1904/1905 in the context of Martyn's objection to Synge's play *The Well of the Saints* which had been produced in February 1905.⁵² This comment, albeit mildly indicative of an anti-Catholic sentiment considering that Martyn was of the same social class as a landowner from Co. Galway as Gregory, is judgmental as to

⁴⁷ William Butler Yeats to Lady Gregory (1901) quoted in Potts, *Joyce and the Two Irelands*, p. 20.

⁴⁸ Lady Gregory to William Butler Yeats ('Monday 16th' [n.y.]), uncatalogued, Berg.

⁴⁹ Lady Gregory to William Butler Yeats (n.d.) quoted in Foster, *A Life I*, p. 369. Foster dates the letter to 1909.

⁵⁰ Lady Gregory to William Butler Yeats ('Saturday' [n.d. 1909?]), Folder 925, Berg.

⁵¹ Lady Gregory to William Butlery Yeats ('Wednesday' [fragment], n.d.), Folder 750, Berg.

⁵² Humphrey, *The Life and Times of Edward Martyn*, p. 185.

character and might be a hint, once again, toward the system of Catholicism with its ‘bondage of the mind’ as Gregory perceived it. Notably, it occurred once more in the context of matters of representation where the portrayal of the Irish people in Synge’s play was seen as objectionable. In order to hold up the aesthetic and reformist ideals of the theatre, Gregory complained that it is she and Yeats who are at the forefront of the defence. When asked by Theodore Roosevelt – whilst on tour in the States with the Abbey in 1911 – about her denomination she responded: ‘All who do anything are Protestants’.⁵³

As this indicates, in the midst of an ascending nationalist movement eager to define Irishness in opposition to Englishness, the religious divide was problematic when it came to questions of representation. Yeats and Gregory were acutely aware that, in order to achieve wide-ranging success and support, ecumenical relations were profitable. In that regard, Gregory encouraged Yeats to recruit Martyn to contribute to an issue of *Beltaine*: ‘And one should get something from Edward, to keep the Church quiet, if he is not afraid of risking his soul by writing’.⁵⁴ Gregory was well aware of the tensions from the outset of her involvement in the dramatic movement when Yeats’s play *Countess Cathleen* caused offence among the Catholic audience and such clashes – subsequently – led to the withdrawal of the theatre’s Catholic co-founder Edward Martyn. Blunt had already ventured a warning with regard to the Abbey’s plays when he had attended a production of Yeats’s *Where There is Nothing* in 1904 at the Court Theatre in London. ‘I am afraid the piece cannot be a success’, he wrote to Gregory. ‘You will put this down to my “sectarian prejudice”, but it is not so. The two last acts are quite impossible from my point of view, literary, dramatic or philosophical. I should despair of Ireland if they were thought good there’.⁵⁵ In the aftermath of the *Playboy*’s riots in 1907, once again, Gregory received a

⁵³ Gregory quoted in Kohfeldt, *Lady Gregory*, p. 229.

⁵⁴ Lady Gregory to William Butler Yeats ([fragment, 1901?]), Folder 803, Berg. Foster refers to ‘token Catholics’. See R.F. Foster, *A Life I*, p. 338.

⁵⁵ Wilfrid Scawen Blunt to Lady Gregory (29 June 1904), Berg.

letter from Blunt in which he gently but firmly expressed his agreement with the rioters: ‘The weakness of your position is that nearly all your writers are protestants &, so, liable to get into religious difficulties, partly through not understanding exactly what will + what will not give offence, partly because the Catholic will never quite trust your being really in sympathy with them’.⁵⁶ Gregory’s work was not exempt from causing offence.

When Gregory was on tour with the Abbey company in America in 1911, the audiences were – in anticipation of the production of Synge’s *Playboy* – to raise their objections. The animosity against the players had already built up before the play was staged. The *Boston Post*, for instance, ‘attacked plays already given’, including Gregory’s comedy *Hyacinth Halvey*. The review’s title, ‘Dr. J.T. Gallagher denounces the Irish Plays, says they are Vulgar, Unnatural, Anti-National, and Anti-Christian’, establishes the issue of representation in both character and religion as unfavourable.⁵⁷ With regard to *Birthright* and *Hyacinth Halvey*, the reviewer asserted that ‘my soul cried out for a thousand tongues to voice my unutterable horror and disgust. ... I never saw anything so vulgar, vile, beastly, and unnatural, so calculated to calumniate, degrade, and defame a people and all they hold sacred and dear’.⁵⁸

Instances such as the *Playboy* riots and objections of *Hyacinth Halvey* illustrate Connor Cruise O’Brien’s assertion that ‘The story of the Irish literary revival in one of its aspects is one of Protestant and Catholic consciousness in intermittent contact, often leading to increasing mutual distrust’.⁵⁹ In order to avoid conflict between the two, it has been argued, the Revivalists adhered to two methods: first, they retreated into folklore and pagan

⁵⁶ Wilfrid Scawen Blunt to Lady Gregory (3 April 1907), Berg.

⁵⁷ Lady Gregory, *Our Irish Theatre: A Chapter of Autobiography* (London/New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1913), p. 179.

⁵⁸ *Boston Post* (4 October 1911) quoted in Gregory, *Our Irish Theatre*, p. 179.

⁵⁹ Connor Cruise O’Brien quoted in Potts, *Joyce and the Two Irelands*, p. 10.

beliefs in order to circumvent the religious divide in contemporary society.⁶⁰ However, Gregory wrote to Blunt in the late nineteenth century:

It is a very extraordinary country – my folk lore researches lead me to believe it is quite Pagan - & that Christianity has only been laid on as a veneer – the real belief is in the ‘invisible’ fairy world - & in magic descended from Druid times – but this is too wide a subject to go into - & I dare not publish because of the priests.⁶¹

What might at first sight be perceived as a romantic idealization of the rural Irish is an apt observation of reality. Gregory’s comment is indicative, perhaps, of both a rural/urban as well as a class split as she discovered the prevalent folk religion along the western seaboard of the island. This is further evidenced by Cardinal Cullen’s attempts to try to conform Irish Catholics to the European norm. Gregory’s remark that she ‘dare not publish because of the priests’ subtly suggests that the clergy were in denial with regards to the belief system in their parishes. Therefore, the contemporary realities of religious life and belief in a regional and socio-demographic context are key.

Secondly, Potts proposes, ‘By the simple technique of populating their plays only with Catholics, Yeats, Synge, and Lady Gregory avoided the whole question of the relationship between the two cultures’.⁶² This argument has a pitfall of perceiving the Abbey’s directorate as a homogenous grouping and basing it – in the case of Gregory – on one review of *Spreading the News* by D.P. Moran.⁶³ In that regard, it is vital to expand our knowledge of Gregory’s plays to incorporate those that have, to date, received little critical attention. In doing so, we will find that the playwright does not, in fact, avoid the religious question. In *Shanwalla*, for instance, as Chapter Three will demonstrate, the audience is

⁶⁰ Note that collecting folklore among the Irish rural poor brought religious difference to the fore, a difference that might be an impediment to the task of collecting of which both Yeats and Gregory were aware. Yeats, for instance, encouraged Katharine Tynan to ‘Gather folk lore & you will not find Mayo dull. There may be Catholic lore instance that would come more readily to you than to Lady Gregory or myself & there is always fairy lore – endless quantities of it’. William Butler Yeats to Katharine Tynan (12 December 1915), *CL*.

⁶¹ Lady Gregory to Wilfrid Scawen Blunt (15 July [1899?]), Folder 27, Berg.

⁶² Potts, *Joyce and the Two Irelands*, p. 19.

⁶³ Potts, *Joyce and the Two Irelands*, p. 19.

presented with a Protestant landlord and his Catholic stableman, thus considering both cross-class and cross-denominational relationships. In the context of the religious divide, Gregory addresses the issue through an historical framework as distrust and tensions between Protestants and Catholics were, for Gregory, grounded in history.

Between 1894 and 1897, Gregory researched and edited her husband's grandfather's letters, published as *Mr. Gregory's Letter-Box* in March 1898, the year of the centenary celebrations of 1798. For Gregory, the rebellion of the United Irishmen stood as a pivotal event in the history of Ireland that had resulted in strained relations between Protestants and Catholics. In the first chapter of *Mr. Gregory's Letter Box*, titled 'Orangeism and Emancipation', she wrote:

Before the dawning of the new century two events had taken place which had revived bigotry and drawn a hard line of separation between the two creeds, the birth of Orangeism, and the rebellion of '98. 'No Surrender,' 'No Popery,' the support of the Crown so long as it supported Protestant ascendancy, these were the cries of the Orange society. Distrust of the Catholics was its leading motive. William the Third, from whom it took its name, was its hero.⁶⁴

To a degree, she bemoaned the lost opportunity the rebellion had presented in creating a bond between the groups:

But when the moment of the rebellion came, its great Protestant leader, Lord Edward Fitzgerald, had already been seized and lay dying in prison, there was no one competent to take his place, the rising took place spasmodically, its guidance fell into the hands of a few violent priests, and instead of a war for liberty or for justice, it became a war of fanaticism and religious hatred.⁶⁵

In her narrative of Irish history, Irish Protestants are excused from responsibility and the blame is laid firmly on the shoulders of the English. '[I]f we look back', she wrote, 'we see that it was not the bigotry of Protestant Ireland, but of England, that kept its foot for so long on the neck of the "Papist."' A record of the whole long struggle would be a record of England's broken promises, beginning with the violated Treaty of Limerick in 1691'.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Lady Gregory (ed.), *Mr. Gregory's Letter-Box: 1813-1830* (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1898), p. 15.

⁶⁵ Gregory (ed.), *Mr. Gregory's Letter-Box*, p. 15..

⁶⁶ Gregory (ed.), *Mr. Gregory's Letter-Box*, p. 29.

Aspects of anti-clericalism and the perception that it was Protestants who displayed the courage and skill to lead are found here. She commented that ‘after ’98, National feeling turned to distrust of the people as Catholics’.⁶⁷ It thus seems important that we turn our attention to a play, *The White Cockade*, that is set during the Williamite War, the aftermath of which gave rise to Jacobitism and provided Orangeism with its central figure of William of Orange.

‘A bad master’: *The White Cockade* (1905)

Upon their invitation for subscriptions to the proposed Irish Literary Theatre in 1897, Gregory and Yeats received a cheque for £1 from an historical romance writer accompanied by a warning: ‘My experience has been that any attempt at treating Irish history is a fatal handicap, not to say absolute bar, to anything in the shape of popularity’.⁶⁸ The project’s elitist approach with its emphasis on art rather than entertainment aside, any theatre depends on an audience in order to survive or succeed. Gregory believed, in opposition to the novelist, ‘to have a real success and to come into the life of the country, one must touch a real and eternal emotion, and history comes only next to religion in our country’.⁶⁹ In this vein, Gregory embarked on the writing of a number of historical plays, published in two volumes in 1912 in both London and New York. Subsumed under the title of *Irish Folk-History Plays*, the first series included *Kincora*, *Dervorgilla*, and *Grania*; the second series contained *The Canavans*, *The White Cockade*, and *The Deliverer*.⁷⁰ A review of the books in the *Athenaeum* supports Gregory’s emphasis on history to achieve success: ‘Ireland looks two ways – if one eye is fixed on an idealized future, the other glances back at an idealized

⁶⁷ Gregory (ed.), *Mr. Gregory’s Letter-Box*, p. 19.

⁶⁸ Quoted in Lady Gregory, *Our Irish Theatre: A Chapter of Autobiography* (London/ New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1913), p. 12.

⁶⁹ Gregory, *Our Irish Theatre*, p. 91.

⁷⁰ Lady Gregory, *Irish Folk-History Plays*, First and Second Series (New York/London: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1912).

past, and no writer can hope to interpret the spirit of the country who is not steeped in its legends and history'.⁷¹ This genre can be seen as most closely associated with her endeavour to educate; 'I still hope to see a little season given up every year to plays on history and in sequence at the Abbey, and I think schools and colleges may ask to have them sent and played in their halls, as a part of the day's lesson'.⁷²

The emphasis on 'Folk-History' not only chimed alongside her interest in oral tradition, but also allowed for artistic freedom when it came to historical accuracy. The tragedies in the first series focused on legends and ancient Irish history that pre-dated Christianity. As such, the events were far removed from a contemporary context and offered a safe ground to avoid the divide between Protestants and Catholics. William Fay, for instance, commented that *Kincora*, with its 'popular subject in historical legend', was seen as 'a safe proposition'.⁷³ This remoteness, however, becomes problematic when we consider *The White Cockade*, set during the Williamite War (1689-91) and featuring King James II and Patrick Sarsfield, the Earl of Lucan.⁷⁴ Gregory's choice of topic was a brave one, considering the divisiveness of the Battle of the Boyne (1 July 1690) in Irish cultural memory. For contemporary Irish society, the event was not an isolated and distant conflict; rather, its repercussions had a continued currency and, in this particular instance, interlaced history with religion.

Symbolic for the defeat of Stuart Ireland, the Battle of the Boyne stood as the end of Irish hopes to revoke the changing power structures between Catholics and Protestants. James Joyce, for instance, isolates 'the fall of the Stuarts and the rise of King William as the moment in which the "unthinking cruelty" of Anglo-Saxon, Protestant domination takes

⁷¹ 'Drama: Lady Gregory's Folk-History Plays', *Athenaeum*, no. 4412 (15 May 1912), p. 602.

⁷² Gregory, *Our Irish Theatre*, pp. 91-92.

⁷³ Fay, *The Fays of the Abbey Theatre*, p. 170.

⁷⁴ Lady Gregory, *The White Cockade*, in Lady Gregory, *The Collected Plays, II, The Tragedies and Tragic-Comedies*, ed. Ann Saddlemyer (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe and Irish University Press, 1971), pp. 219-254. Hereafter cited parenthetically within the text abbreviated as *CPII*.

hold'.⁷⁵ With the subsequent introduction of the Penal laws from the 1690s onwards, Catholics and non-conformists were severely restricted in social, political, and economic mobility. Although the impact of the laws varied considerably, Douglas Hyde noted in 1893: 'Aughrim and the Boyne put an end to the dream that the Irish would ever again bear sway in their own land, and the carefully-devised Penal laws proceeded to crush all remaining independence of spirit out of them, and to grind away their very life-blood'.⁷⁶ For Protestants, however, William of Orange's victory at the Boyne confirmed Protestant supremacy in Ireland. Although Aughrim was strategically of more importance, the Boyne held greater symbolic value due to the presence of both James II and William III. Since the founding of the political and sectarian society of the Orange Order in 1795, the battle has been celebrated annually on 12th July.

In April 1905, Gregory had her 'mind full of a play about King James – Seumus Salach "Dirty James" as he has been called since he ran away from the Boyne'.⁷⁷ The play was 'practically finished' three months later and, Gregory noted, both Yeats and her son Robert 'like it'. In a letter to Blunt, she added: 'James II is the broken idol which shatters all faith & belief & longing & it is comedy'.⁷⁸ This presented a rather curious juxtaposition. Moreover, the political context added to the potential divisiveness of the topic. Shortly before Gregory had finished *The White Cockade*, the *Irish Times* reported on the 'July Anniversary: Celebrations in Belfast':

The 215th anniversary of the Battle of the Boyne was celebrated in Belfast yesterday by two demonstrations. [...] The procession was the largest and most imposing seen for many years, there being two hundred and two lodges present, as against one hundred and ninety-six in 1904. [...]

They who lived south of the Boyne needed all the moral support they could get, for the Roman Catholics, under the malign and un-Christian influence of the

⁷⁵ James Joyce quoted in Frank Shovlin, *Journey Westward: Joyce, Dubliners, and the Literary Revival* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012), p. 65.

⁷⁶ Douglas Hyde, *A Literary History of Ireland: From Earliest Times to the Present Day* (New York: Charles Cribner's Sons, 1901), p. 594.

⁷⁷ Lady Gregory to Wilfrid Scawen Blunt (14 April 1905), Folder 34, Berg.

⁷⁸ Lady Gregory to Wilfrid Scawen Blunt (24 July 1905), Folder 35, Berg.

priests and the Catholic Association, were getting worked up to greater intolerance, nay, hatred, of Protestants than ever, and he did not hesitate to declare his firm belief that this hatred and contempt of Protestants did not always exist, but was the product of jealousy of the independence, prosperity, and general superiority of Protestants. (Hear, hear.)⁷⁹

Thus, the sectarian connotations of Gregory's historical subject matter could potentially have presented a 'fatal handicap' when staged at the Abbey. She was aware of the contemporary relevance when writing in the *Letter-Box* in 1898:

for Orangeism still flourishes, and Orange lilies, here in the West of such harmless tendency that they brilliantly deck the altars of village chapels, still unfold their petals as a declaration of war when the July sunshine falls on Ulster. The feud seems likely to last for many a long year yet, and to give lively occupation to the police and magistrates of the new century.⁸⁰

For Catholics, on the other hand, it could also 'touch a real and eternal emotion' of oppression and victimhood; as it is summarised in *The Leader*: 'The moment is that fatal one when the Catholics of Ireland ruined themselves in the Stuart cause, a blow from which they have never recovered. For Ireland is still paying indemnity for the campaign of the Boyne'.⁸¹ Most potently, the historical setting established the correlation between religion and landed wealth. James Anthony Froude estimated that by 1703 about 90 per cent of the land was 'held by Protestants of English or Scottish extraction'.⁸² The playwright's families – both the Persses and the Gregorys – profited from the Jacobites' defeat in the 1690s, and their estates in County Galway prospered in consequence of the Penal Laws. It is this interlocking of history and religion that complicates Gregory's statement in which she places both – as if unconnected – next to each other.

⁷⁹ 'July Anniversary: Celebrations in Belfast', *The Irish Times* (13 July 1905), p. 6. Brian Walker notes that the 12th of July parades 'enjoyed widespread support and [...] were well attended' from the 1880s onwards. See Brian Walker, *Past and Present: History, identity and politics in Ireland* (Belfast: The Institute of Irish Studies Queen's University Belfast, 2000), p. 80.

⁸⁰ Gregory, *Mr. Gregory's Letter-Box*, p. 28.

⁸¹ 'Spectator', 'A play and a solitude', *The Leader* (23 December 1905), p. 300.

⁸² Froude quoted in Daniel Corkery, *The Hidden Ireland: A Study of Gaelic Munster in the Eighteenth Century* (Dublin: M.H. Gill and Son, 1956), p. 30. J.C.D. Clark notes that Corkery 'strangely avoided much explicit mention of Jacobite allegiance'. See J.C.D. Clark, 'The Many Restorations of King James: A Short History of Scholarship on Jacobitism, 1688-2006', in Paul Monod, Murray Pittock and Daniel Szechi (eds), *Loyalty and Identity: Jacobites at Home and Abroad* (London: Palgrave, 2010), p. 30.

In focussing on James II, Gregory can be seen to interrogate and, perhaps, emphatically imagine the Catholic narrative of the Battle of the Boyne. Apart from the Captain and two Williamite soldiers, we do not encounter the iconic figure of Orangeism. Therefore, Gregory appears to have taken sides in her approach. The title of the play, *The White Cockade*, refers not only to the Jacobite emblem, but also to a popular ballad by the same name. Jacobite sympathies – whether in Scotland, England or Ireland - have been described as exhibiting cynicism, sentimentality, and nostalgia. The latter, in particular, can be detected in William Ross’s poem ‘An Suitheans ban’, or ‘The White Cockade’. According to Murray Pittock, it ‘displays a valedictory quality which even the most ideologically committed Jacobites could see was approaching more and more closely to what was true in reality’ in which the hope for a Stuart restoration was reputed:

Farewell to the White Cockade
Till Doomsday he in death is laid,
The grave has ta’en the White Cockade,
The cold tombstone is now his shade.⁸³

This air was initially associated more with Scottish Jacobitism and the failed rebellion of 1745 in particular, but it was adapted by the Irish and Irish Brigades used it as a battle song.⁸⁴ In later centuries, Jacobite songs were also used in recruiting advertisements, giving testament to their efficacy as ideological instruments. Written by the poets Seán Ó Tuama and Séan Clárach Mac Dómhnaill in the eighteenth century, the song is also known as ‘An Cnota Bán’.⁸⁵ The British context is further apparent in a London-based journal titled *The White Cockade: A Jacobite Journal*, founded in 1894 in the midst of the *fin de siècle* phenomenon in a revival of Jacobitism.⁸⁶

⁸³ Murray G.H. Pittock, *The Invention of Scotland: The Stuart Myth and the Scottish Identity, 1638 to the Present* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 70.

⁸⁴ Murray G.H. Pittock, *Poetry and Jacobite Politics in Eighteenth-Century Britain and Ireland* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 192.

⁸⁵ Guy Beiner, *Remembering the Year of the French: Irish Folk History and Social Memory* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2007), p. 94.

⁸⁶ Clark, ‘The Many Restorations of King James’, p. 30.

The Jacobite cause inspired numerous poems and songs in the form of laments ‘for the loss of her [Ireland’s] Stuart lover’.⁸⁷ Much of eighteenth-century Jacobite poetry stems from ‘a rebellious discourse expressed through millenarian and sectarian rhetoric’.⁸⁸ The popularity of Jacobite poetry, Hyde noted, ‘gave rise to a conventional form of its own, which became almost stereotyped’.⁸⁹ For instance, according to a story Richard Hayes recorded in County Mayo, ‘The White Cockade’ was played in the nineteenth century and ‘considered a fitting tribute to the memory of a veteran rebel of Ninety-Eight’, thus linking the Jacobite cause with the rebellion of the United Irishmen.⁹⁰ What was once specific to a particular cause gained greater symbolic currency which allowed for a narrative of continuity that linked Irish national heroes from the seventeenth century to the present.

Jacobitism, in its association with nationalism, has an inherent sectarian element as ‘James is a saviour-figure not despite his Catholicism, but because of it’.⁹¹ The sectarian potency manifests itself when we consider that ‘The White Cockade’ is juxtaposed, in Gregory’s play, with another ballad, ‘Lillibullero’, representing allegiance to James II and William III respectively. Considered as a best-known Williamite song, it is ‘supposed to have sung James out of his three kingdoms’. Its verse is not only anti-Irish, but also anti-Catholic:

Ho, brother Teig, dost hear the decree
 Dat we shall have a new debittie:
 Ho, by my soul, it is a Talbot
 And he will cut all de English throat.⁹²

Such sentiments and connotations would have created strong resonances among Gregory’s audience, particularly if we consider the topicality of Jacobitism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

⁸⁷ Lady Gregory, ‘Irish Jacobite Song’, *The Speaker* (January 1903), p. 414.

⁸⁸ Beiner, *Remembering the Year of the French*, p. 87.

⁸⁹ Hyde, *A Literary History of Ireland*, p. 596.

⁹⁰ Beiner, *Remembering the Year of the French*, p. 94.

⁹¹ Pittock, *Poetry and Jacobite Politics*, p. 194.

⁹² Pittock, *Poetry and Jacobite Politics*, p. 33.

Gregory tapped into this contemporary resurgence of interest in Jacobitism that spanned from the 1880s to the outbreak of the First World War.⁹³ She had already acknowledged the pivotal role of poetry and song in Irish cultural memory in her article ‘The Felons of Our Land’ (1900). ‘Irish history’, she wrote, ‘having been forbidden in the national schools, has lifted up its voice in the streets, and has sung the memory of each new generation’. She added: ‘Sometimes it is a movement that is celebrated, the ’98 rebellion above all’.⁹⁴ The principal characteristic of the ballads Gregory explored, is a narrative of defeat, loss and failure:

In Ireland he [the poet] is in touch with a people whose thoughts have long been dwelling on an idea; whose heroes have been the failures, the men ‘who went out to battle and who always fell,’ who went out to a battle that was already lost – men who, whatever may have been their mistakes or faults, had an aim quite apart from personal greed or gain.⁹⁵

Such political – albeit romantic – sympathy with the rebel cause offered a safe form of nationalism; as long as the rebels were defeated and failed in their efforts, Gregory’s status and that of her class would be safe.

Her particular interest in Irish Jacobitism dated from the summer of 1902. ‘I am also collecting & translating Jacobite poems’, she wrote, ‘which are still sung here & there, but more for the sake of the poets who made them than for James’ sake; for as an old man told me a day or two ago “they liked him well before he ran, but they didn’t like him after that”’.⁹⁶ Her findings were published in an article on ‘Irish Jacobite Songs’ in January 1903 in *The Speaker*.⁹⁷ Having come across a verse that included the line ‘My heart leaps up with my bright Stuart’, Gregory, surprised by such a positive memory of the Stuarts, began to

⁹³ Clark, ‘The Many Restorations of King James’, p. 29.

⁹⁴ Lady Gregory, ‘The Felons of Our Land’, *Cornhill Magazine*, vol. 8, no. 47 (May 1900), p. 624.

⁹⁵ Gregory, ‘The Felons’, p. 634.

⁹⁶ Lady Gregory to Wilfrid Scawen Blunt (22 June 1902), Folder 29, Berg.

⁹⁷ Gregory, ‘Irish Jacobite Songs’, pp. 413-415. This article was reprinted, titled ‘Jacobite Ballads’, in 1903 in Lady Gregory, *Poets and Dreamers: Studies and Translations from the Irish by Lady Gregory* (Dublin: Hodges, Figgis, & Co.; London: John Murray, 1903), pp. 66-75. An article of the exact same title was published anonymously in 1896 in *The Royalist*. See Pittock, *The Invention of Scotland*, p. 176.

enquire among the local people. Gregory remembered the local poet, Anthony Raftery (c. 1784-1835), writing:

‘James,’ he says, ‘was the worst man for habits ... he laid chains on our bogs and mountains. ... The father wasn’t worse than the son Charles, that left sharp scourges on Ireland. When God and the people thought it time the story to be done, he lost his head. ... The next James, sharp blame to him, gave his daughter to William as woman and wife; made the Irish English, and the English Irish, like wheat and oats in the mouth of harvest.’

One of ‘the wise old neighbours’ she talked to, said: ‘I don’t think the people had ever much opinion of the Stuarts, but in those days they were all prone to versify. But the famine did away with all that’. Indeed, his retreat from the battlefield was the turning point in public opinion of the Catholic king. The names of James and Charles, Gregory asserted, were likely the last to be remembered in verse, ‘for the imagination of Ireland still tilts the beam to the national side, and the loyalty the poets of three hundred years have called for is loyalty to Kathleen ny Houlihan. “Have they not given her their wills and their hearts and their dreams? What have they left for any less noble Royalty?”’⁹⁸

Indeed, the rather muted and critical attitude expressed toward the Stuart King might stand at odds with the nationalist sympathies associated with Jacobite poetry. However, as Daniel Corkery asserts, in the Irish *aisling* tradition, ‘the place that the Stuarts themselves occupy in the Scottish poems is occupied in the Irish poems by Ireland herself’.⁹⁹ Despite the fall of the Stuarts, Jacobite poetry remained popular. The reason, Pittock proposes, is ‘the *aisling*’s nationalism and not its Jacobitism’.¹⁰⁰ The *aisling* is a vision poem in which a woman – representing Ireland – seduces men into battle. Whilst initially the restoration of the country was achieved through a sexual act, in the nineteenth century this erotic component was replaced by an appeal to blood sacrifice and the nation restored by death rather than sexual pleasure.

⁹⁸ Gregory, ‘Irish Jacobite Songs’, pp. 413, 415.

⁹⁹ Corkery, *Hidden Ireland*, p. 134.

¹⁰⁰ Pittock, *Poetry and Jacobite Politics*, p. 194.

There are variations in the feminine representation of Ireland. She is generally perceived as the ‘carrier of a prophetic message’, originating from the *aisling*. She occurs in the form of the *spéirbhean* or sky-woman who is associated with royalty. Alternatively, she can appear as a young and beautiful woman, or an old woman, drawn from the more ancient tradition of the *Cailleach Bhéarra*.¹⁰¹ It is the initial association with royalty that provides Jacobite poetry and thought with an elitist, rather than populist, framework.¹⁰² Thus, its aristocratic elitism can be understood as the key reason why Jacobitism appealed to Gregory and her contemporary Protestant grandees, including Emily Lawless.

Gregory had explored the theme of ‘loyalty to Kathleen ny Houlihan’ in the autumn of 1901 when she was collaborating with Yeats on the writing of *Cathleen ni Houlihan*. This play was indebted to the tradition of the *aisling* and, fittingly, based on Yeats’s dream that he described ‘as distinct as a vision’.¹⁰³ Yeats’s and Gregory’s *Cathleen ni Houlihan* tapped into the contemporary popularity Jacobitism enjoyed. However, its romantic sacrificial appeal stands at odds with Gregory’s attitude towards the commemoration of 1798. A journal entry from March 1898 gives testimony to a contrast in their opinions:

I hope he won’t get into mischief – We don’t quarrel about ’98, for as I told him the rebellion was two things – one in intention – the other in execution – In intention it was an attempt for national freedom, & if it had succeeded we should all now be celebrating it (he says he wd not, he wd be against the existing Govt. then!). In execution it was a massacre of Protestants, & I have no idea of celebrating that, but if he likes to celebrate the intention, well & good.¹⁰⁴

Taking into consideration Gregory’s co-authorship of *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, her familiarity with Jacobite ideology and poetry, the ‘Poor Lady’ in *The White Cockade* appears at a first glance to be yet another representative of the *aisling* tradition who laments

¹⁰¹ Beiner, *Remembering the Year of the French*, pp. 92-93.

¹⁰² Breandán Ó Buachalla, ‘Irish Jacobitism and Irish nationalism: the literary evidence’, in Michael O’Dea and Kevin Whelan (eds.), *Nations and nationalisms: France, Britain, Ireland and the eighteenth-century context* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1995), p. 109.

¹⁰³ Yeats quoted in James Pethica, ‘Lady Gregory’s Abbey Theatre drama: Ireland real and ideal’, in Shaun Richards (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century Irish Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 64.

¹⁰⁴ Entry for 9 March 1898, *Diaries*, p. 177.

‘for the loss of her [Ireland’s] Stuart lover’.¹⁰⁵ Notably, the 1905 publication of the play highlights this Jacobite motif in its epigraph: ‘I saw a vision through my sleep last night’.¹⁰⁶ Among the reviews of the play, *The Daily Express* is the only paper that picked up on the association: ‘The poor lady is probably intended to represent Erin at that stirring period, but at all events she depicts in quite a pathetic way the prevailing opinions of the time held regarding James II. – the leader of a losing cause’.¹⁰⁷ Joseph Holloway, however, noted in his diary that the actress Maire nic Shiubhlaigh as Lady Dereen ‘suggested “Cathleen ni Houlihan” at almost every turn’.¹⁰⁸ *The Freeman’s Journal* also commented: ‘The character of the old lady is strikingly pathetic. The great dignity of the sorrow-laden lady who has her estates, her ever-buoyant hopes expressed in stirring and poetic pathos, are magnificent features of the play, which raise it to a high level in the dramatic art’.¹⁰⁹ It is she who represents – apart from Sarsfield – loyalty to the Stuart monarch. The hope in King James’s victory is tied in the play to the hope of the repossession of property lost. After the Cromwellian settlement, the majority of land changed hands from Catholics to Protestants and the Poor Lady is one of the Catholic landed aristocracy who lost their land. Her costume epitomizes the shift in degraded status, dressed in ‘ragged clothes that have once been handsome’ (CPII 221).

However, there is no indication that she stands as ‘Lady Eire’; rather, she is given a specific name, Lady Dereen, and the lost land is specifically her property instead of the more metaphorical ‘four beautiful green fields’ of *Cathleen ni Houlihan*. The Innkeeper’s wife, Mrs. Kelleher, sympathises with the old lady’s fate ‘to go in beggary and misery ever after’. As a former servant on Lady Dereen’s estate, she remembers ‘the time [she] had great

¹⁰⁵ Gregory, ‘Irish Jacobite Song’, p. 414.

¹⁰⁶ Gregory, *The White Cockade* (Dublin: Maunsell, 1905) quoted in Shovlin, *Journey Westward*, pp. 82-83.

¹⁰⁷ “‘The White Cockade’: New Play at the Abbey Theatre’, *The Daily Express*, (11 December 1905), p. 6.

¹⁰⁸ Entry for 9 December 1905, Joseph Holloway, *Joseph Holloway’s Abbey Theatre – A Selection from his unpublished Journal Impressions of a Dublin Playgoer*, ed. by Robert Hogan and Michael J. Neill, with a preface by Harry T. Moore (Carbondale/Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1967), p. 63.

¹⁰⁹ ‘*The White Cockade*’, *The Freeman’s Journal* (11 December 1905), p. 6.

riches' (*CPH* 221). Hopeful in the Stuart cause of the Williamite War, the old Lady says: 'I have had great losses, but now I will have great gains. I lost all through Charles; I will get all back through James. [...] I shall be rich again now; I never lost my faith' (*CPH* 221). Lady Dereen is concerned with her personal economic position and longs for a return to wealth and luxury as she looks forward to 'my silks and my velvets' and the 'jewels about my neck' (*CPH* 226). However, she proclaims that 'James [...] will bring prosperity to us all' (*CPH* 222). How the other characters will profit remains unexplored. When the owner of the Inn, Matt Kelleher, returns home, he brings news from Ross that the battle of the Boyne has been won and James is lauded for 'raging like a lion in every gap', 'The brave Stuart!'. With his victory, they assume, 'We'll all get our rights' and Lady Dereen will reclaim her property: 'You'll get your estates, Lady, and your white halls!' (*CPH* 226). Despite this short reference to the rights of the Catholics, the emphasis throughout the play is on the old lady's reclaiming of the property. Thus, the play is preoccupied with an immediate economic concern and the realities of everyday life.

Gregory's substantial contribution to the writing of *Cathleen ni Houlihan* has been comprehensively demonstrated by Pethica and his analysis of the play's manuscript reveals the 'powerful melding of Lady Gregory's realist, practical interests with Yeats's symbolic preoccupations'.¹¹⁰ Gregory and Yeats, then, represent the two elements at work in the play: the juxtaposition of the romanticised nationalist ideology with the harsh reality of the socio-economics in a rural family setting. The scene in the cottage with its careful attention to detail 'was dependent on Lady Gregory's greater sympathy for and dramatic sense of peasant life'.¹¹¹ For instance, Michael Gillane's mother Bridget comments on the benefits of her son's marriage: 'a fine strong young man. It is proud she must be to get you – a good

¹¹⁰ Pethica, 'Lady Gregory's Abbey Theatre drama', p. 67.

¹¹¹ James Pethica, "'Our Kathleen': Yeats's Collaboration with Lady Gregory in the Writing of *Cathleen ni Houlihan*", in Deirdre Toomey (ed.), *Yeats and Women: Yeats Annual No. 9*, 2nd edition (London: Macmillan; New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), p. 211.

steady boy, that will make use of the money, and will not be running through it, or spending it on drink, like another'. Her focus is on the profit of the marriage match: 'now things are going so well with us, and the Cahels such a good back to us in the district, and Delia's own uncle a priest, we might be put in the way of making Patrick himself a priest some day, and he so good at his books'.¹¹² Similarly, Owen Kelleher's mother in *The White Cockade* is not lured by any romanticised idea of heroism or nationalist ideology, and judges everything according to whether it would be economically viable. The *Evening Telegraph* favourably commented on the realism of the play:

Mary is an industrious peasant who is hard at work salting pork for shipment in the French vessel lying in the harbour. At the fire her son, Owen, a dreamy, lazy youth, lies amusing himself playing the game of Jackstones. There is good dialogue between them, which brings out the character of the peasant woman very well.¹¹³

However, there is a reversal of economics in *The White Cockade*. The emphasis, as argued above, is placed on Lady Dereen's economic condition as she seeks solace and shelter in the home of her former servant. Thus, rather than focusing on the rural classes, as in *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, it is the aristocracy's decline that is put on display. The Kellehers, as representatives of the lower social order, are comparatively comfortable, pursuing their business. Mrs. Kelleher's most repeated phrase, alongside her cumbersome rhetoric of proverbs, is: 'it might be for profit':

MRS. KELLEHER. So long as we get it, I wouldn't mind much what King brings it. One penny weighs as good as another, whatever King may have his head upon it. If you want to grow old, you must use hot and cold.

LADY. Is it nothing to you, Mary Kelleher, that the broken altars of the Faith will be built up again?

MRS. KELLEHER. God grant it! Though indeed, myself I am no great bigot. I would always like to go to a Protestant funeral. You would see so many well-dressed people at it. (CPII 222)

¹¹² Yeats, *The Hour-Glass*, pp. 56-57, 59.

¹¹³ "'The White Cockade': Lady Gregory's New Play at the Abbey Theatre', *Evening Telegraph* (11 December 1905), p. 6.

Here, the link between religion and social and economic status becomes apparent; it is the Protestants who are 'well-dressed'. However, Mrs. Kelleher's comment is devoid of a sense of envy or anger regarding inequality. In contrast to the claim of Rev. Dr. Moffatt that was quoted in the *Irish Times*, Gregory proposes more amicable ecumenical relations which are not indicative 'of jealousy of the [...] general superiority of Protestants'.¹¹⁴ There is no sense of strong political loyalties, but rather an emphasis on the practicalities of everyday life that echo Bridget Gillane's in *Cathleen in Houlihan*, and foreshadow Mrs. Hevenor's concerns in *The Wrens*.

In contrast to the old woman's overt recruitment of the Gillanes' son in *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, Lady Dereen does not directly appeal to Owen's heroic ambitions, but rather states in a manner of reportage that 'The young men are leaving the scythes in the meadows; the old men are leaving the stations and the blessed wells. Give me some white thing – some feathers – I have to make cockades for the King's men' (*CPII* 222). Whilst Michael is lured by Cathleen ni Houlihan's rhetoric, Owen sits lazily and disinterestedly in his home, day dreaming about becoming a man of action rather than actually becoming one. Yet Owen desires to be elsewhere, to be in a place where something is happening:

OWEN.	It is beyond the hills I would like to be going. There is no stir at all in this place. [...] There is fighting going on through the country.
MRS. KELLEHER.	And for all the profit it will bring ourselves it might be the fighting of the hornless cows! It is best for us to be minding our own business.
OWEN.	There used to be great fighters in Ireland in the old times.
MRS. KELLEHER.	If there were, they had no other trade! Every crane according to its thirst. Believe me, if they had found as good a way of living as what you have, they would not have asked to go rambling. I know well it is an excuse you are making, with your talk of fighting and your songs, not to be doing the work that is at your hand. You are as lazy as the tramp that will throw away his bag. (<i>CPII</i> 220)

¹¹⁴ 'July Anniversary: Celebrations in Belfast', *The Irish Times* (13 July 1905), p. 6.

Owen, rather than being politically driven to take up arms himself, longs for the excitement of action that presents, for him, an attractive alternative to the daily routines of life at his home. Indeed, Mrs. Kelleher proposes that the ‘great fighters in Ireland’ only joined battle because they had nothing to lose.

Mrs. Kelleher’s comment further suggests that the family lives a fairly comfortable life and can profit from the war by trade, rather than risking one’s life in battle. Owen’s talk of fighting, it is implied, is nothing more than idle chatter to distract from daily work whereby the heroic ideal of the man of action is challenged. The ideal of the strong young man who, hitherto, showed responsibility and adhered to temperance in *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, is inverted to a friendly idler. Owen’s father, Matt, is eager to take a glass to ‘drink to the King! Where are the glasses?’ His wife counters: ‘[you are] too good a customer to yourself’:

MATT.	Would you begrudge me so much as one glass on a day like this?
MRS. KELLEHER.	What has happened on this day more than any other day? (<i>CPII</i> 225)

Matt, it is implied, enjoys a drink on a regular basis. Indeed, when they toast the Stuart cause by the end of the first act, he raises the glass to pay tribute to ‘The King and wine without duty’ (*CPII* 228). Here, then, the men of the house are not actively seeking to participate in the fight for the Stuart cause that could restore Catholic rights and access to land.

This opens the debate between Lady Dereen and Mrs Kelleher regarding questions of loyalty and heroism. When incited by the poor lady to ‘get up’ as ‘there is plenty of work to do’, Owen’s mother, who continuously nags him about his laziness, joins in: ‘That is what I am saying’ (*CPII* 222). Yet whilst Mrs Kelleher wishes for support in the running of the business, the old lady chastises him for not joining the battle, ‘You lying here, while

there is a friend out under the heat of the day fighting our battle' (*CPII* 222, 223). The following argument echoes the dialogue in *Cathleen in Houlihan*:

MRS. KELLEHER. Look here now, Lady, have sense. I have but the one son only, and is it sending him away from me you would be?
 LADY. Our King has no son; he has false daughters. We must give our sons to the King!
 MRS. KELLEHER. It is my opinion we must keep them to mind ourselves. What profit would he get joining the King's army? It is not the one thing to go to town and come from it.
 LADY (*putting hand on her arm*). It would be a pity to disappoint so great a friend.
 MRS. KELLEHER. That is true, but reason is reason. I have but the one son to help me; and it is what I say: you can't whistle and eat oatmeal; the gull can't attend the two strands; words won't feed the friars. How will Owen mind this place, and he maybe shot as full of holes as riddle?
 OWEN. When you have your minds made up if it's to go fighting I am, or to go rubbing the bacon I am, it will be time enough for me to stir myself. (*CPII* 223)

In *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, both the bride and the mother beg Michael not to enlist in service to the old woman. They rate, Joseph Valente argues, 'private interests and domestic affective concerns higher than nationalist aspirations and the good of the people, a stereotypically feminine attitude with which this particular play registers no sympathy'.¹¹⁵ In *The White Cockade*, however, what Valente considers feminine attitudes are not the sole prerogative of the female characters in the play as long as Owen demonstrates an indifference to the battle. Although half-heartedly willing to join the King's army, he is unsure as to 'how' to serve James II. 'You say that because of idleness', the Lady confronts him: 'It is through idleness you have come to have a coward's heart, the heart of a linnet, of a trader, a poor, weak spirit, a heart of rushes' (*CPII* 223). Owen has to decide between 'The Stuart in the field' and 'The meat in the cellar!' (*CPII* 224). The choice, as in *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, is between the economics of the private sphere and the politics of the country. Owen's decision, we can assume, depends on the strength of his loyalty to his country and,

¹¹⁵ Joseph Valente, 'The Myth of Sovereignty: Gender in the Literature of Irish Nationalism', *ELH*, vol. 61, no. 1 (1994), p. 200.

more specifically, the attraction of the concept of heroic action. While Lady Dereen encourages him to join the battle with her own profit in mind, it is Sarsfield who expresses the rhetoric of sacrifice.

Whilst James II was remembered as the cowardly king who fled after the battle of the Boyne, Patrick Sarsfield entered the Irish pantheon of nationalist heroes in ballad poetry and cultural memory. The latter's heroic status in Irish cultural memory is evidenced by a nationalist monument erected in Limerick in 1881.¹¹⁶ The Catholic poet Katharine Tynan pays tribute to his final fall on the battle field in Landen in the poem 'The Flight of the Wild Geese' (1885):

Ah! Patrick Sarsfield, when you lay,
With your life-blood following amain,
You looked at the dark stain on your hand,
And "Would it were shed for mine own dear land!"¹¹⁷

Two years later, the Protestant grandee Emily Lawless wrote about the General in *Ireland*:

Sarsfield is the one redeeming figure upon the Jacobite side. His gallant presence sheds a ray of chivalric light upon this otherwise gloomiest and least attractive of campaigns. He could not turn defeat to victory, but he could, and did succeed in snatching honour out of that pit into which the other leaders, and especially his master, had let it drop.¹¹⁸

Considering both writers' differing denominational and political background, this illustrates Jacobitism's generic appeal which created, as Shovlin writes, 'a curious bridging ground between the two main traditions in Ireland'.¹¹⁹ Both Tynan's and Lawless's rhetoric of 'life-blood following amain' and 'chivalric light' respectively have romantic overtones with a stress on the heroic.

¹¹⁶ Beiner, *Remembering the Year of the French*, p. 244. To give further testimony to his status in Ireland today, the following GAA Clubs across the island have adopted the name: Patrick Sarsfields (Antrim), Sarsfields Derrytrasna (Armagh), Sarsfields (Cork), Sarsfields (Galway), Sarsfields and Sarsfields Hurling Club (Kildare), Abbey Sarsfields (Limerick), Legan Sarsfields (Longford), Ardnaree Sarsfields and Charlestown Sarsfields (Mayo), Thurles Sarsfields (Tipperary), Drumragh Sarsfields (Tyrone), Sarsfields (Wexford).

¹¹⁷ Katharine Tynan, *Louise de la Vallière and other poems* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, 1885), p. 24.

¹¹⁸ Emily Lawless, *Ireland* (1887; London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1912), pp. 289-90.

¹¹⁹ Shovlin, *Journey Westward*, p. 87.

Gregory's play, at first glance, equally introduces Sarsfield as 'the one redeeming figure'. The second act of *The White Cockade* presents the audience with the contrasting personalities of Sarsfield and James II as they are hiding in a wood debating war strategies. While Sarsfield is confidently outlining the plan of attack to turn around the defeat at the Boyne, James is more concerned with his personal safety (*CPII* 228). Whereas Sarsfield is a man of action willing to face danger, the King is portrayed as the fearful coward who retreats rather than attacks. When Owen – on his way to gather news of the outcome of the Battle – accidentally meets James's group, he unknowingly tells them the news that the King has been defeated at the Boyne and that he had come upon 'Men from the north' telling him of the King's retreat: 'if they got him, they would give his legs rest for a while' (*CPII* 231). This confirms James's sense of danger and he decides to hide at the Kellehers' Inn before embarking on the French ship to leave Ireland. Owen departs singing, in hope of 'James, / Our treasure and our only choice – The darling Caesar of the Gael!' (*CPII* 232). This is immediately followed by James's comment: 'That was a good chance. We can go on board at once, and slip away to France. I have done with this detestable Ireland' (*CPII* 232).

The king's cowardice is most potently evoked when the group hears fife and drum playing the Williamite song 'Lillibulero' and, with the swelling of the music, James – as instructed by the stage directions – is '*clinging to Sarsfield*' (*CPII* 233). What is perceived within the context of the play as the reality stands in stark contrast to the previous gossip Matt brought home of the 'brave Stuart', 'raging like a lion'. The audience is even given the impression that James fears Sarsfield's vociferously volatile temperament. He says of him: 'He makes me start up. He has no feeling for repose, for things at their proper time, for the delicate, leisurely life. He frets and goads me. He harries and hustles' (*CPII* 246). This lavishly feeds into contemporary attitudes of the Stuart King. For instance, James Connolly described James II as 'the most worthless representative of a worthless race that ever sat on

a throne'.¹²⁰ Indeed, 'Lady Gregory's presentation of that monarch on the stage does not possess any feature of attractiveness', stated the *Daily Express* following the play's opening night on 9 December 1905.¹²¹ In contrast, the *Irish Independent* wrote: 'Mr. F.J. Fay gave a Sarsfield that appealed to the imagination – the antithesis of the King, a dashing, noble-hearted soldier and patriot'.¹²² With this contrast, Gregory negates James II's place as a representative leader for Ireland whose selfish interests disregard the interest of the country. Praising the play's unity, *The Leader* highlights that 'The central idea is the contrast between the man, Sarsfield, who is by nature the leader of his people, and the poltroon, James, whom his lineage and their loyalty have unfortunately placed in that position'.¹²³

In the midst of James's and Sarsfield's disagreement, the latter is quickly reminded of his loyalty by the king's secretary: 'I hope General Sarsfield will loyally follow your Majesty's orders'. Sarsfield counters: 'Obey them? And what about Ireland – the lasting cry? Am I listening to that?' (*CPII* 233). Gregory juxtaposes Sarsfield's considerations for 'what is best for Ireland' with James's distaste for the country. Loyalty to Ireland is given priority over loyalty to the sovereign as sympathy resides with the General. As we are back in the Inn's kitchen in the second scene of the second act, the gossip regarding the victory at the Boyne has been rectified. Lady Dereen takes the news of the defeat hard, asking for 'my royal Stuart' (*CPII* 234). Just as Owen informs his family that the king is expected that evening, two Williamite soldiers arrive. Shortly thereafter, James and Sarsfield enter, let in by drunken Matt, and the Williamites seize their arms. As the king is threatened, Sarsfield steps forward declaring himself to be James II to protect his master. With the two opposing sides of the battle represented in one room, they discuss the conflict:

¹²⁰ Éamonn Ó Ciardha, "'A lot done, more to do": The Restoration and Road Ahead for Irish Jacobite Studies', in Paul Monod, Murray Pittock and Daniel Szechi (eds), *Loyalty and Identity: Jacobites at Home and Abroad* (London: Palgrave, 2010), p. 60.

¹²¹ 'The White Cockade', *The Daily Express* (11 December 1905), p. 6.

¹²² 'The White Cockade', *Irish Independent* (11 December 1905), p. 6.

¹²³ 'Spectator', 'A play and a solitude', *The Leader* (23 December 1905), p. 300.

SARFIELD. I am sorry all the men of Ireland are not on the one side.

FIRST WILLIAMITE. It is best to be on the winning side. [...]

SARFIELD. He is surely the winner who gets a great tombstone, a figured monument, cherubs blowing trumpets, angels' tears in marble – or maybe he is the winner who has none of these, who but writes his name in the book of the people. I would like my name set in clean letters in the book of the people. (*CPII* 240)

Sarsfield's statement is in keeping with Gregory's appreciation of Irish ballads of defeat. It is also a self-referential comment as – by the time Gregory wrote *The White Cockade* – Patrick Sarsfield's name had indeed entered the 'book of the people'. Gregory's own hopes for a unified effort of the different political factions in Irish society and her preoccupation for a positive reputation are reflected in Sarsfield's speech.

The dialogue further explores the dichotomy between the sovereignty of king or country, ultimately merging the two to comply with the aesthetics of the *aisling* tradition:

OWEN (*who has been listening eagerly*). It must be a wonderful thing to be a King!

SARFIELD. Wonderful, indeed – if he have the heart of a King – to be the son and grandson and great-grandson of Kings, the chosen and anointed of God. To have that royal blood coming // from far off, from some source so high that, like the water of his palace fountain, it keeps breaking away from the common earth, starting up as if to reach the skies. How else would those who are not noble know when they meet it what is royal blood? [...] (*looking at JAMES*). A wonderful thing! If he have the high power of a King, or if he take the counsel that should be taken by a King. To be a King is to be a lover – a good lover of a beautiful sweetheart.

FIRST WILLIAMITE. I suppose he means the country, saying that.

SECOND WILLIAMITE. I am sure he must have a heart for Ireland. (*CPII* 241-242)

Technically clever, Sarsfield's impersonation of the King is critical of his master; 'if he' only had the heart or the bravery. James's approach to the war is undermined and lampooned, exposing him as unworthy to be 'the chosen and anointed'. The reference

to ‘a good lover of a beautiful sweetheart’ taps into the generic approach whereby the Stuart was replaced by Ireland in Jacobite thought from the eighteenth century onwards. Gregory expands on this analogy, as Sarsfield says:

To go out, to call his men, to give out shouts because the time has come to show what her strong lover can do for her – to go hungry that she may be fed; to go tired that her dear feet may tread safely; to die, it may be, at the last for her with such glory that the name he leaves with her is better than any living love, because he has been faithful, faithful, faithful! (*CPII* 242)

The two Williamites concede that ‘The Dutchman would not have those thoughts for Ireland’ (*CPII* 242). It is not, as in *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, the old woman who calls for a self-sacrifice, but the General of the battle himself who speaks on her behalf. He enacts the role of James II, as Ireland’s King and the saviour of Catholic rights, should have filled. This exploits the King’s lack of leadership. Sarsfield’s impersonation convinces even the two Williamites: ‘I give up the Dutchman’s pay. This man’s the best’, says one. ‘We will fight for you five times better than ever we fought for the Dutchman’, says the other. Owen is willing to ‘follow him every hard road’ and his father promises to ‘never drink another drop till he has come to his rights!’ (*CPII* 242).

However, rather than leaving the Inn to go into battle with reinforcements from the converted Williamites, James and his secretary hide by the pier to plan his escape. What follows is a version of Hyde’s play, *Rí Séamus*, that he had written in the autumn of 1903 and which Gregory had translated from Irish into English.¹²⁴ Hyde’s one-act farce focuses on the king’s flight by hiding in a barrel to be taken on board a French ship. Gregory incorporates that plot-line into *The White Cockade*. Once the barrel hiding James is opened and the king appears, one Williamite announces: ‘It is the little priest!’ (*CPII* 251). The association of James as a ‘little priest’ stresses the farcical nature of the play. *The Freeman’s*

¹²⁴ ‘An Craoibhin Aoibhinn’ [Douglas Hyde], *Selected Plays of Douglas Hyde, with translations by Lady Gregory*, chosen and with an introduction by Gareth W. Dunleavy and Janet Egleson Dunleavy (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1991), pp. 152-165. Likewise, Hyde emphasises the craven King. One of the Jacobite soldiers describes him as: ‘The coward that deceived us’ and ‘an ugly cur’. *Ibid.*, p. 155.

Journal remarked: ‘Lady Gregory has not spared James in the least. Her object, indeed, seems to have been to show how useless a task it was fighting for one so worthless’.¹²⁵ Similarly, *The Leader* noted that ‘Tradition represents that monarch as an abject coward, and the play even surpasses tradition in that respect’.¹²⁶

The group assembles around the exposed James II, abusing him as a ‘traitor’ who tried ‘to desert the King’ (*CPII* 251). Once James’s royal identity is clarified, there is general disbelief:

ALL TOGETHER.	<i>That His Majesty!</i>
MRS. KELLEHER.	It seems to me we have a wisp in place of a broom.
OWEN.	Misfortune on the fools that helped him!
FIRST WILLIAMITE.	Is it for him we gave up William?
MATT.	And that I myself gave up drink! [...]
JAMES.	I have business in France. You may stay here, General Sarsfield, if you will. But I will lead you no longer; I will fight no more for these cowardly Irish. You must shift for yourself; I will shift for myself. (<i>CPII</i> 252)

As the King walks out, Owen is ‘*throwing off cloak and belt, and tearing cockade from his hat, throws himself down and begins to play jackstones as in First Act.*’) (*CPII* 252). We are back where we started. James’s cowardice comes to its apex; Gregory lampoons, with Owen’s words, the Irish who believed in the Stuart King. Catholic Ireland’s supposed saviour is unworthy of self-sacrifice and Owen is not stirred into battle.

At the end of the play, Gregory discloses the faultiness of Jacobite – and nationalist – ideology. The two Williamites toss a coin to decide whether to follow ‘the one we left or the one who left us’; the coin decides they are to abandon the white cockade and return to the service of William of Orange (*CPII* 253). Even the enthusiastic Sarsfield is momentarily shocked into apathy:

he betrayed me – he called me from the battle – he lost me my great name – he betrayed Ireland. Who is he? What is he? A King or what? (*He pulls feathers one by one from cockade.*) King or knave – soldier – sailor – tinker – tailor –

¹²⁵ ‘The White Cockade’, *The Freeman’s Journal* (11 December 1905), p. 6.

¹²⁶ ‘Spectator’, ‘A play and a solitude’, *The Leader* (23 December 1905), pp. 300-301.

beggarman – thief! (*Pulls out last feather.*) Thief, that is it, - thief. He has stolen away; he has stolen our good name; he has stolen our faith; he has stolen the pin that held loyalty to royalty! A thief, a fox – a fox of trickery! (*He sits down trembling.*) (CPII 253)

His feelings of betrayal are spoken on behalf of Catholic Ireland. For a moment, it appears as if his loyalty to the sovereign fails. However, he instantly takes up a new white cockade, putting it on his head and, thereby, embraces the ideology of self-sacrifice for a lost cause. Sarsfield turns into one of those Irish rebels Gregory had lauded in her article, ‘The Felons of Our Land’; by reclaiming the white cockade, he joins those ‘who went out to a battle that was already lost – men who, whatever may have been their mistakes or faults, had an aim quite apart from personal greed or gain’.¹²⁷ At this point in the play, political reality succumbs to romantic nationalism. In tone, this would be equivalent to the ending of *Cathleen ni Houlihan* whereby Sarsfield replaces Michael Gillane.

If the play had ended with Sarsfield’s speech, we could interpret it within the framework of romantic Jacobitism. However, Sarsfield’s self-sacrifice is put under scrutiny as Mrs. Kelleher asks him: ‘Why would you go spending yourself for the like of *that* of a king?’ He makes a feeble attempt at explanation, displaying an underlying uncertainty: ‘Why, why? Who can say? What is holding me? Habit, custom. What is it the priests say? – the cloud of witnesses. Maybe the call of some old angry father of mine, that fought two thousands years ago for a bad master!’ Lady Dereen concludes that Sarsfield must be ‘a very foolish man to go on fighting for a dead king’. ‘I think there’s rats in the loft’, says Mrs. Kelleher. The final words are left to her: ‘Poor Patrick Sarsfield is very, very mad!’ (CPII 254). For some members of the audience, this was an ‘unsatisfying’ end, evidenced by one gentleman whispering to Joseph Holloway ‘Is it over now?’¹²⁸

¹²⁷ Gregory, ‘The Felons’, p. 634.

¹²⁸ Entry for 9 December 1905, Holloway, *Joseph Holloway’s Abbey Theatre*, p. 63.

Considering Gregory's responsibility for the Gillanes' dialogue and the cottage setting, we can assume that the playwright's reservations regarding the realities of nationalist martyrology were already prevalent in *Cathleen in Houlihan*. Michael's father rather dismissively refers to the old woman's rhetoric: 'She doesn't know well what she's talking about, with the want and the trouble she has gone through'.¹²⁹ His wife, Bridget, is aghast as she observes the transformation in her son: 'Look at him, Peter; he has the look of a man that has got the touch'.¹³⁰ Their observations foreshadow Lady Dereen's and Mrs. Kelleher's judgment of Sarsfield's self-sacrifice as an act of lunacy. Importantly, if we are to take Lady Dereen as the symbolic old woman of the *aisling* tradition, she withdraws from her lament to raise men into battle to fight for the restoration of her property. She accepts the lost cause; there is no renewal or rejuvenation. Coincidentally, as a representative of the Catholic aristocracy, Lady Dereen's refraining from support of the Stuart cause ensures that – in contemporary terms – Gregory, as a member of the Protestant aristocracy, retains her lands (if we are to ignore the land reforms of the time). This undeniable link between religion and social status adds an element of sectarian elitism to the play.

Thus, it can be argued, *The White Cockade* challenges not only political Jacobitism, but also romantic Jacobitism. Sarsfield – one key example of the pantheon of Irish nationalist heroes – is lampooned for his illogical willingness to follow 'a bad master' that even the Catholic Irish have turned their backs on. The latter are seen to prioritise pragmatism over ideological allegiances whether to sovereign or country. James Pethica argues in an essay on Gregory's drama that Sarsfield's 'final self-sacrifice [...] offers those around him the potential for "spiritual vision", even though they prove too debased to profit from his example'.¹³¹ Conversely, the ending of the play suggests that the Irish – of both the

¹²⁹ Yeats, *The Hour-Glass*, p. 68.

¹³⁰ Yeats, *The Hour-Glass*, p. 76.

¹³¹ Pethica, 'Lady Gregory's Abbey Theatre drama', p. 73.

higher and lower social order – realize the futility of the ‘spiritual vision’, rather than being ‘too debased’ to follow; they declare it an act of insanity.

Once Gregory had finished the play, she sent it to Blunt in late September 1905. She wrote: ‘I like the White Cockade best, Colum our young peasant writer says “it is all a folk ballad” & that is just what I tried to get into it’. The emphasis on folklore reflects her preoccupation of that summer as she had just finished her *Book of Saints and Wonders*. Despite such confidence and pride, however, Gregory was unsure whether Blunt would warm to the play. ‘I don’t know that you will like it’, she remarked, ‘if you still belong to the League of the White Rose’.¹³² This is further confirmation of the Jacobite resurgence around the turn of the century, illustrated by a Stuart Exhibition held at the New Gallery in Regent Street in 1889. Gregory’s mention of the ‘League of the White Rose’ might be a reference to the Order of the White Rose, established in 1886, which facilitated a renewed interest in the subject that was further explored in the society’s publication, *The Royalist*, which ran from 1890 – the anniversary of the Battle of Culloden – to 1905.¹³³ At one time, the Order counted close to 500 members.¹³⁴ Five years after its initial foundation, a more radical grouping split from the Order calling itself the Legitimist Jacobite League of Great Britain and Ireland having a clearer defined political aim of the Stuart restoration.¹³⁵ Gregory’s mixed phrase, including both ‘League’ and ‘White Rose’, could be a reference to either one of these organisations.

In Blunt’s book on *The Land War in Ireland*, we find a diary entry for 26 January 1887. Whilst in Egypt, Blunt stayed at the Royal Hotel where he met Ashburnham with whom he agreed about ‘republicanism and the liberty of nations’. Blunt wrote: ‘He and Lord

¹³² Lady Gregory to Wilfrid Scawen Blunt (24 September 1905), Folder 35, Berg.

¹³³ Clark, ‘The Many Restorations of King James’, p. 30. See also Ian Fletcher, *W.B. Yeats and his Contemporaries* (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1987), pp. 95-96.

¹³⁴ Fletcher, *W.B. Yeats and his Contemporaries*, p. 96.

¹³⁵ Murray Pittock, *Spectrum of Decadence: The Literature of the 1890s* (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 98-99.

Beaumont have been for a long time the only two English Jacobites. But he tells me there are now thirty or forty persons who have formed themselves into a Jacobite Club, and who dine together and toast “the Queen over the water”. He says the idea is gaining ground, and invites me to join them’.¹³⁶ This indicates that Blunt was acquainted with representatives of the initial Order of the White Rose. If we are considering Blunt’s political thought and his emphasis on ‘republicanism’, it is plausible to conclude that Blunt might have joined first the Order and, once the split occurred, attached himself to the more radical grouping which was more in keeping with his own politics.

It has been suggested that this rather specialised interest occurring in societies and publications ‘was far more a social than a political one, an aesthetic protest against utilitarianism and materialism but also an attempt to create a secret space, insulated from these Protestant pressures’.¹³⁷ Some of the key literary figures of the 1890s had Jacobite sympathies, including McGregor Mathers and Lionel Johnson. It is in regard to the latter two, and the circle of the Rhymers Club, that Yeats was also acquainted with such sympathies, suggesting an overlap in the political, romantic, and occult aspects of Jacobitism and the diverse spectrum of groups. ‘One quality such sects have in common’, Fletcher argues, is ‘the pursuit of power, [...] they are aristocrats whether of blood, or intellect or by ordeal’.¹³⁸ Irish Jacobite poetry was not exempt from this initial attachment to elitism as it ‘was originally a conservative rhetoric imbued with the traditional values of aristocracy, hierarchy, hereditary right and social order’. However, Ó Buachalla further argues, ‘it was also, potentially and eventually, a radical rhetoric in that it foretold, extolled

¹³⁶ Entry for 26 January 1887, in Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, *The Land War in Ireland* (London: Stephen Swift, 1912), pp. 211-212.

¹³⁷ Clark, ‘The Many Restorations of King James’, p. 30.

¹³⁸ Fletcher, *W.B. Yeats and his contemporaries*, pp. 112, 117.

and promoted the overthrow of the existing regime. It must accordingly be counted among the factors that contributed to the politicisation of Irish Catholics'.¹³⁹

Although *The White Cockade* presents us with a Jacobite theme and motif, its call 'to the politicisation of Irish Catholics' fails; the Kellehers stay put and Lady Dereen abandons her hopes for the Stuart cause, lampooning Sarsfield's continued loyalty to the sovereign. Considering the interlacing of Jacobitism with nationalism in the context of the early twentieth century, Gregory's comment to Blunt would suggest that she perceived her play to be not only anti-Jacobite, but also anti-nationalist. As, in Irish Jacobite thought, the Irish nation was synonymous with the restoration and renewal of the Irish Catholic nation, it would also suggest that she was awake to the play's possible anti-Catholic perception.¹⁴⁰ Her concern appears to have been unnecessary. Following the premiere of the play, she once again wrote to Blunt: 'It was good of you to let me know you liked my "White Cockade"'; with pride she noted that 'many people were enthusiastic over it – but our audiences were small – we have not conquered the apathy of Dublin yet'. Among the members in the audience was John Redmond and he 'liked it very much'.¹⁴¹ Just as Gregory was aware that her farcical presentation of the fallen hero of James II could be offensive, she was equally aware of the play's nationalist appeal. In December 1905, she wrote: 'The audience from patriotic motives would applaud Sarsfield and almost hissed King James, who retired in a sulk and wouldn't appear at first curtain'.¹⁴² However, the play did not go down well with everyone. Hugh Lane was 'loudly abusing the wigs and the costumes and saying the whole

¹³⁹ Breandán Ó Buachalla, 'Irish Jacobite Poetry', *The Irish Review*, no. 12, (Spring/Summer, 1992), pp. 47-48.

¹⁴⁰ Ó Buachalla, 'Irish Jacobitism and Irish nationalism', p. 110. Ó Buachalla quotes an anonymous Jacobite writer asserting in a pamphlet written between c. 1696 and 1712: 'I call the Irish Catholics *the nation of Ireland*, because Protestants therein are deemed generally but intruders and newcomers'. See *Ibid.*, p. 110.

¹⁴¹ Lady Gregory to Wilfrid Scawen Blunt (24 December 1905), Folder 35, Berg.

¹⁴² Lady Gregory, *Seventy Years*, ed. Colin Smythe (New York: Macmillan, 1974), p. 415.

thing was like a charade, and could not get into his head that King James wasn't meant to be serious!'¹⁴³

In fact, following its premiere, both *The Daily Express* and *The Leader* commented on the small audience at the Abbey. The former states: 'It was [...] a matter of regret that the first production of the play was not patronised by a larger audience'.¹⁴⁴ The 'Spectator' notes in the latter: 'One thing only was lacking – an audience, and that lacking with a vengeance the night I was there'. This was due, the reviewer proposes, to the Abbey's adherence to high art and high class:

They have gone about saying they do not want the public, that they do not wish to make their plays a commercial success, but they desire 'fit audience tho' few', and the like. They have also closed their doors in the face of sixpenny patrons. Six pennies will admit you to the Gaiety or the Royal, to the Opera or to Esposito, but the uncommercial theatre must have its shilling's worth of flesh. The public has unhappily believed these pretensions, and feeling that it were indelicate to force their company on a household so exclusive, they have left the players to perform in the Arctic solitude which they profess to love.¹⁴⁵

The following proposition is made to the Abbey Theatre:

In truth, the one thing now needed is to procure spectators, to give courage to the vulgar, and withdraw that artistic interdict which at present scares them away. Once make them believe these are real plays, and real actors performing for the benefit of a real audience, and they will come quick enough. As in Russia, the best way to inaugurate reform and restore public confidence might be by an extension of franchise. Let in the sixpenny *moujik*, and the people will begin to take hope, and feel that the day of oligarchy is at an end.¹⁴⁶

Despite *The Leader's* significant praise, it hints toward the exclusivity of the theatre's approach and administration that, the paper appears to suggest, was targeted rather at a bourgeois audience. This concern was equally expressed by Joseph Holloway. Following the play's premiere, he remarked on the attendance: 'A goodly crop of the usual first-nighters to be seen at the Society's plays was present, but very few of the ordinary public put in an appearance'. His following comment anticipates *The Leader's* attitude: 'Yeats, as

¹⁴³ Lady Gregory to William Butler Yeats ('Friday' [February 1906?]), Folder 79, Berg.

¹⁴⁴ "'The White Cockade': New Play at the Abbey Theatre', *The Daily Express* (11 December 1905), p. 6.

¹⁴⁵ 'Spectator', 'A play and a solitude', *The Leader* (23 December 1905), p. 300.

¹⁴⁶ 'Spectator', 'A play and a solitude', *The Leader* (23 December 1905), p. 301.

the mouthpiece of the Society, is forever saying in print that they don't want them, and certainly the public caters strictly to the Society's wish in the matter by remaining away'.¹⁴⁷

If we are to believe D.P. Moran's assertion that those frequenting the Abbey were mainly Anglo-Irish, Gregory's angle in dealing with the Battle of the Boyne from a Catholic perspective might be seen as odd. However, if we bear in mind the outcome of the Williamite War in favour of the Protestant side it would seem fitting. Yet the favourable reception among Catholics is notable.

One of *The White Cockade*'s admirers was Maud Gonne. Writing from Paris to Yeats – who had sent her a copy of the play – on 16 December 1905, she stated:

I have just read the *White Cockade*. [...] Lady Gregory knows the soul of our people and expresses it as no one else does. Through the surface of triviality, of selfish avarice, of folly which often jars on one, she never ceases to see and to express in her writing that deep passion which *only heroic* action or thought is able to arouse in them, & when once aroused makes them capable of sacrifice for ideals as no other people on earth are. It is a play that will live & [...] It is a play that will be popular – don't look contemptuous – such plays are needed for your work & for the public.¹⁴⁸

Gonne's reference to 'the soul of our people' brings to mind an article by Maurice Joy, published only a few months previously in *The New Ireland Review*. Founded in 1894 by Father Tom Finlay, Professor of Economics at UCD, it became the 'house organ' and gave voice to Catholic militancy.¹⁴⁹ Joy asserted that the Revivalists 'criticisms of life are too academic: they are not by men who have shared the struggle: they have but an external consciousness of Ireland's tragedy':

¹⁴⁷ Entry for 9 December 1905, Holloway, *Joseph Holloway's Abbey Theatre*, p. 63. When he attended the play again on 12 December, he noted once again 'the presence of a meagre house'. Ibid. Note that the theatre's secretary, George Roberts, had somewhat irresponsibly and in demonstration of his slackness not sent out press passes whereby there were fewer reviews in the newspaper, probably impacting on the small audiences. See Kelly and Schuchard (eds), *The Collected Letters of W.B. Yeats, Volume Four: 1905-1907* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 245, n. 1.

¹⁴⁸ Maud Gonne to William Butler Yeats (16 December 1905) in Anna MacBride White and Alexander Norman Jeffares (eds), *The Gonne-Yeats Letters, 1893-1938* (London: Pimlico, 1993), p. 222. Yeats subsequently passed on Gonne's letter to Gregory. See Kelly and Schuchard (eds), *The Collected Letters of W.B. Yeats, Volume Four: 1905-1907* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 253.

¹⁴⁹ See Potts, *Joyce and the Two Irelands*, p. 26.

The Irish Literary Revival, as at present spoken of, connotes the work of A.E., Mr. Yeats, Lady Gregory, and Mr. Synge chiefly. Not one of them has been reared in Catholic tradition, and although Renan said genius does in a day the work of centuries, it is not clear that it can overcome in one the prejudices of many generations. These writers have broken with their own tradition. Some of them are Nationalists. [...] It is, perhaps, humanly impossible that their work should have all that sympathy which is necessary to a complete understanding of Ireland's soul.¹⁵⁰

If Maud Gonne had been the only one embracing Gregory's ability to express the soul of the Irish people (despite her Protestantism), there would not be a substantial argument. However, Alice Milligan equally praised the play in a very similar vein in an article on 'Yeats and the Drama', published in *Sinn Féin* in December 1906: 'I must say that nothing I have read in recent years seems so wholesome and good for national propaganda as some of [Gregory's] writing, notably *The White Cockade*'.¹⁵¹ The play might have appealed to Gonne and Milligan for its Jacobite associations as they had been involved in the centenary celebrations of 1798. In this case, then, Gregory appears to have successfully tapped into the narrative of Catholic victimhood that initiated the idealization of 'heroic action or thought'. Gonne prioritises Sarsfield's rhetoric of self-sacrifice, dismissing what she acknowledges as elements 'of selfish avarice' and 'of folly' as 'triviality'. In that regard, Gonne identified clear Jacobite ideas in the play: 'Jacobitism always represented the triumph of an idea over reason, common sense and the tendency of events'.¹⁵² Her prediction that the play would be a hit with the Abbey audience did not materialise. *The White Cockade* was only revived sporadically, with just 40 performances between 1905 and 1932.¹⁵³

Considering the play's similarities to *Cathleen in Houlihan* and the Jacobite aesthetic, this is rather surprising. Perhaps not everyone was as willing to dismiss the pragmatism and

¹⁵⁰ Maurice Joy, 'The Irish Literary Revival: Some Limitations and Possibilities', *The New Ireland Review*, vol. XXIII, no. 5, (July 1905), pp. 259, 264-265.

¹⁵¹ Alice L. Milligan, 'Yeats and the Drama', *Sinn Féin* (31 December 1906) in Robert Hogan and James Kilroy, *The Abbey Theatre: The Years of Synge 1905-1909* (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1978), p. 120. When a revival of the play was considered in 1911, Yeats wrote to Gregory: 'I think we shall have to drop the White Cockade. [Nugent] Monck is a little afraid of it and hasn't enough time to experiment, I think he feels that it is a little too Irish for him at the moment'. William Butler Yeats to Lady Gregory (18 November 1911), *CL*.

¹⁵² Fletcher, *W.B. Yeats and his contemporaries*, p. 118.

¹⁵³ <http://www.abbeytheatre.ie/archives/search/plays/the%20white%20cockade/> Accessed 25.05.2012.

realism of the play. Gregory, in a letter to Yeats, commented on the Abbey programme in 1913 that *Cathleen ni Houlihan* and *The White Cockade* were not suitable for the same bill with ‘two lamenting old women’.¹⁵⁴ Perhaps such a double bill would have exposed her preference for pragmatics. The Kellehers’ priority for material concerns – ‘it might be for a profit’ – cannot be easily dismissed. Even one of the Williamite soldiers asks for economic profit for his services: ‘Give us our fee! Give us an estate! I would like mine in County Meath’ (*CPII* 248). Pragmatism is not the prerogative of Catholics and it is not confined to a specific social class; rather, everyone subscribes to it apart from Sarsfield – and he is declared to be ‘mad’. In light of such a display of realism and reasoning, Yeats’s estimation of *The White Cockade* offers the exact opposite interpretation as he claims it ‘is a beautiful, laughing, joyful extravagant and yet altogether true phantasy’:

I have noticed by the by that the writers in this country who come from the mass of the people, – or no, I should say who come from Catholic Ireland, have more reason than fantasy. It is the other way with the leisured classes. They stand above their subject and play with it, and their writing is, as it were, a victory as well as a creation.¹⁵⁵

When the play was considered for a revival in 1930, Gregory was ‘afraid Cockade may not be very money-making but the bit of romantic history is needed after all the rather overloaded comedy’.¹⁵⁶ In the end, however, she delightedly wrote to Yeats that the ‘Cockade is going splendidly’ and that it was ‘really a comfort seeing a romantic play so well received’.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁴ Lady Gregory to William Butler Yeats (30 June 1913), Folder 382, Berg. Gregory noted in her journal in 1930 that Alice Stopford Green ‘wondered, I was told, when she saw me act Kathleen ni Houlihan that night I had to take the place of Maire Walker, how I could have done so “Being so little in sympathy with the patriotic feeling of the play”. Rather hard, considering my share in writing it’. Entry for 26 July 1930, Gregory, *Journals II*, p. 546.

¹⁵⁵ William Butler Yeats to Florence Farr (6 October 1905) in John Kelly and Ronald Schuchard (eds), *The Collected Letters of W.B. Yeats, Volume Four: 1905-1907* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p.204. Yeats repeated this view in spring 1906 when he claimed that the play ‘wants an audience who can think themselves into sympathy with a dreamy point of view’, concluding that ‘It is too loosely constructed for a normal audience’. W.B. Yeats to John Quinn (1 May 1906)) in John Kelly and Ronald Schuchard (eds), *The Collected Letters of W.B. Yeats, Volume Four: 1905-1907* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 394.

¹⁵⁶ Lady Gregory to William Butler Yeats (26 April 1930), uncatalogued, Berg.

¹⁵⁷ Lady Gregory to William Butler Yeats (9 May 1930), uncatalogued, Berg.

The White Cockade stands as a puzzling piece in Gregory's oeuvre and its double ending allows for two very different interpretations. Considering her interest in Irish rebel songs and folklore, it is reasonable to perceive the play in the tradition of romantic Jacobitism. In addition, even one of Robert Gregory's horses was named after Sarsfield. When he came of age in 1902, Gregory remarked on his homecoming:

the pleasure & profit of becoming an Irish landlord is not very great. It means for him a facing of hard questions & responsibility. I am giving him a horse to keep up his spirits. I am of course very thankful & glad that he is starting life on such good terms with the people. And I am glad that he has had the chance of hearing both sides of political questions from friends on both sides – that is more than most Irish landlords have had a chance of.¹⁵⁸

Considering the fact that Gregory had been collecting Jacobite songs that summer, it is tantalizing to assume that Robert's coming-of-age horse was indeed Sarsfield. In light, then, of his mother's comments with regards to the difficult times for Irish landlords, this would suggest her hope that despite this hard and perhaps lost cause Robert would face it with courage – just like Sarsfield.¹⁵⁹

The Freeman's Journal writes: 'The trust placed in James by the Irish people of all classes, the willingness of the aristocrat and the peasant to place faith in him, are pictured with skill'.¹⁶⁰ More significantly, however, is the positive review that appeared in *The Leader*, worth quoting at length:

'The White Cockade', by Lady Gregory, is one of the good things of the National Theatre Society. [...] A beautiful and pathetic figure is the 'Poor Lady' – a distraught and ruined wanderer in the Stuart cause, acted with admirable feeling and delicacy. [...] The loyal devotion of this poor female Lear, brings before us all that insane religion of Stuart loyalty which ruined our people in those days. What a terrible thing was that devotion of the many to the worthless one! No doubt, the treacherous royal figure-head was at that time in Irish eyes the palladium of their religion, their freedom, and even their nationality. But we may, in truth, be glad that the drab-lined ideas of American democracy has in

¹⁵⁸ Lady Gregory to Wilfrid Scawen Blunt (22 June 1902), Folder 29, Berg.

¹⁵⁹ Lennox Robinson remarked about Gregory's preferred type of hero: 'Anything noble and, perhaps, fated'. Robinson (ed.), *Journals*, p. 53. In April 1905, Gregory wrote to Blunt: 'Our tenants have at last proposed to buy, & I hope we may get through without trouble'. Lady Gregory to Wilfrid Scawen Blunt (3 April 1905, Folder 34, Berg.

¹⁶⁰ 'The White Cockade', *The Freeman's Journal* (11 December 1905), p. 6.

our day displaced the deceptive glitter of the English constitution. It is impossible to describe here with what subtle art the poor worn figure and the wandering mind of this withered devotee are made to express the fallacy of those principles which, in their result, annihilated our aristocracy, and gave our commons to bondage and long-continued persecution.¹⁶¹

This is an unusual source for such high praise. ‘If any figure from the Revival could be said to speak for Irish Catholics it was Moran’, Potts proposes.¹⁶² As such, Moran took great pleasure in attacking Yeats and his co-Revivalists, including AE, Gregory, and Synge.¹⁶³ Coincidentally, in 1905, he published *The Philosophy of Irish Ireland* consisting of six essays which previously appeared in Finlay’s paper. In this context, it is all the more surprising to find such a positive commentary on Gregory’s play as it would have been easy to attack a Protestant landowner writing about the Catholic defeat at the Boyne. The play’s criticism of Catholic allegiance to the Stuart cause is recognised and, it appears, shared and accepted.

Gregory’s approach has been lauded also by Ernest Boyd, one of the Revival’s early critics, who argued that the

treatment of one of the most delicate and dangerous subjects in Irish history indicates that Lady Gregory is able to bring considerable impartiality to the portrayal of national subjects. The dramatists of the Irish Theatre have broken with the tradition which demanded the patriotic idealizations of melodrama from all who essayed to dramatize the history of Ireland’s struggle for freedom.¹⁶⁴

D. George Boyce has argued that ‘Irish society was too divided on sectarian lines to enable any Protestant, however talented or committed, to enter into the experience of the other side’.¹⁶⁵ Considering *The White Cockade*’s reception, Gregory appears to have been successful – at least imaginatively – in doing exactly that. In part, the success might reside with the genre: ‘I feel historical plays are an absolute necessity here if the Drama is to take a

¹⁶¹ ‘Spectator’, ‘A play and a solitude’, *The Leader* (23 December 1905), p. 301.

¹⁶² Potts, *Joyce and the Two Irelands*, p. 31.

¹⁶³ Potts, *Joyce and the Two Irelands*, p. 34.

¹⁶⁴ Ernest A. Boyd, *The Contemporary Drama of Ireland* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1917), p. 136.

¹⁶⁵ D. George Boyce, “‘One last Burial’: Culture, Counter-revolution and Revolution in Ireland, 1886-1916”, in D. George Boyce (ed.), *The Revolution in Ireland, 1879-1923* (London: Macmillan Education, 1988), p. 135.

grip of the people'.¹⁶⁶ The topic of Irish history, after all, did not appear to have been a handicap. Historical plays appeared to be a bridging method between the diverse faction of Irish politics. Following the production of Gregory's *Kincora*, for instance, she received a letter from Patrick Pearse who expressed his hope for 'a closer comradeship between the Gaelic League and the Irish National Theatre and Anglo-Irish writers generally'. He added, however, that 'Plays like Mr. Synge's [...] discourage one'.¹⁶⁷

Gregory, who directed the play herself, clashed during the rehearsal process with Frank Fay who played the role of Sarsfield. When Joseph Holloway attended one of the rehearsals:

Mr. F.J. Fay was in one of his moods, and when Lady Gregory showed him, with great clearness and dramatic effectiveness (for the dramatic instinct is strongly developed in her), how she would like a certain passage ... given, he turned crusty and sulked at it, saying, 'It is out of the mood of the role,' and adding that if she wished to make 'Sarsfield' a comedy part he would play it as such. After much talk and explanation, Frank Fay went half-heartedly through the passage after the manner suggested by Lady Gregory.¹⁶⁸

Here, the tensions between the directors and the actors are apparent and, just as on stage, the battle off stage was one between Protestants and Catholics. This further illustrates that the reception of particular characters is dependent upon the acting and that there is a fine line between comedy and farce or bitter satire. Andrew Malone considered the play 'as comedy [her] greatest achievement', and acknowledged that 'its satire is as bitter as it is deserved'.¹⁶⁹ In the end, Fay's role as Sarsfield appears to have managed this balance. Holloway's niece and her friend 'thought [*The White Cockade*] "the best of the long plays produced at the Abbey," and simply worshipped "Sarsfield"'.¹⁷⁰

When, in 1909, Gregory published *The Kiltartan History Book*, it was 'Dedicated and recommended to the History Classes in the New University'. The little book was

¹⁶⁶ Lady Gregory to Wilfrid Scawen Blunt (16 January 1905), Folder 33, Berg.

¹⁶⁷ Patrick Pearse to Lady Gregory (29 April 1905), MS 27,828, NLI.

¹⁶⁸ Entry for 25 October 1905, Holloway, *Joseph Holloway's Abbey Theatre*, p. 62.

¹⁶⁹ Andrew Malone, *The Irish Drama* (London: Constable & Co., 1929), p. 256.

¹⁷⁰ Entry for 9 December 1905, Holloway, *Joseph Holloway's Abbey Theatre*, p. 63.

accompanied by a few illustrations drawn by her son, Robert. Gregory had written about her son to Blunt in 1901: ‘Robert professes Imperialism – he is still young enough to be attracted by bigness, but I am not anxious about him, he hears all sides, & has prints in both camps’.¹⁷¹ The collaboration between mother and son sheds further light on the production of *The White Cockade* for which Robert had designed the scenery and costume to great effect. ‘This play is perhaps the most poetically staged of the entire period up to the present, and Robert Gregory is to be congratulated for his share in the result’, commented Holloway.¹⁷² When he praised his work to her, ‘her faced glowed with motherly pride, and she pardonably waxed enthusiastic over her boy’s artistic achievement’.¹⁷³ Perhaps, then, the play’s theme of divided loyalties, its multifaceted argument, and the ambivalent ending are to be seen in the tradition of Gregory’s ambition that her son – and by extension the Irish public in general – should consider ‘all sides’.

Thus, it comes as no surprise, perhaps, that among Robert’s illustrations of Daniel O’Connell and Napoleon we find one of William of Orange. In Gregory’s short paragraph on ‘The Stuarts’ it says:

As to the Stuarts, there are no songs about them and no praises in the West, whatever there may be in the South. Why would there, and they running away and leaving the country the way they did? And what good did they ever do it? James the Second was a coward. Why didn’t he go into the thick of the battle like the Prince of Orange? He stood on a hill three miles away, and rode off to Dublin, bringing the best of his troops with him.¹⁷⁴

Significantly, at the end of the little booklet Gregory states: ‘I do not take the credit or the discredit of the opinions given by the various speakers, nor do I go bail for the facts; I do but record what is already in “the Book of the People”’.¹⁷⁵ Conveniently, the words are put into

¹⁷¹ Lady Gregory to Wilfrid Scawen Blunt (26 June 1901), Folder 25, Berg.

¹⁷² Entry for 12 December 1905, Holloway, *Joseph Holloway’s Abbey Theatre*, p. 64.

¹⁷³ Entry for 12 December 1905, Holloway, *Joseph Holloway’s Abbey Theatre*, p. 65.

¹⁷⁴ Lady Gregory, *The Kiltartan History Book*, illustrated by Robert Gregory (Dublin: Maunsel and Company, Ltd., 1909), p. 17.

¹⁷⁵ Gregory, *The Kiltartan History Book*, p. 51.

the mouth of the (Catholic) country people; and they seem to suggest that James II should have taken William of Orange as an example for a proper (Protestant) leader.

The White Cockade can be seen as a moment of transition in which her empathy for political Catholicism becomes apparent, as exemplified by the contemporary responses. In subsequent years, her engagement with popular Catholic piety increased. This would culminate in her poem *The Old Woman Remembers* with its 'rosary of praise' (in which Sarsfield is included). In addition to this form of engagement with Catholic ritual, Gregory's continuous contributions to the local Catholic community as, for instance, in the form of flowers given on Corpus Christi Day can be seen as active anti-sectarianism.¹⁷⁶ Unintentionally, but ironically, Gregory's selection of yellow and white flowers for the Church was not without symbolic value: 'today going through Gort to church and seeing flags waving, yellow and white I heard they are the Papal colours'. She concluded, 'I could not have given a better bundle than they had taken'.¹⁷⁷

What can be discerned from Gregory's personal experience and actions as well as her writing is a necessity for the refinement of the difference between personal religious practice and belief on the one hand and the system on the other. She accepted and was open to individual Catholics, but objected to aspects of the institution of the Catholic Church. In that regard, she was not unusual as criticism came equally from a Catholic quarter. Thus, if criticism is voiced by someone who is not part of the group it is not necessarily indicative of a prejudiced sectarianism. Conversely, after noting that Synge's *In the Shadow of the Glen* was attacked while Padraic Colum's lesser play, *Broken Soil*, was praised, Fay explains that Synge was 'a Protestant and a member of the "Ascendancy" class, whereas Colum was a Catholic and of the people'; 'It was a patriotic duty to haul down the one,' he wrote, 'and

¹⁷⁶ See, for instance, Entries for 3 June 1926, 15 June 1927, 25 April 1929, *Journals II*, pp. 102, 193-194, 431. See also Anne Gregory, *Me & Nu: Childhood at Coole*, illustrated by Joyce Dennys (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1970), pp. 93-94.

¹⁷⁷ Entry 28 April 1929, Gregory, *Journals II*, p. 433.

cheer the other'.¹⁷⁸ In the case of *The White Cockade*, *The Leader* apparently did not adhere to such a 'patriotic duty'.

The play stands in the tradition of Gregory's interest in Irish political ballads, as already explored most prominently in relation to *The Rising of the Moon*. Her sympathy for the lost cause is both romantic and political. Yet her romanticism is not free from political criticism of 'that insane religion of Stuart loyalty'. Considering the symbolic importance of the Stuart cause in Jacobite poetry popular at the time, *The Leader's* acceptance of – and agreement to – Gregory's estimation is remarkable. In light of this, then, Fay's estimation that attack and appraisal were dependent on the denominational relationship between author and audience rather than on literary merit is challenged. As the favourable response to *The White Cockade* among a Catholic audience and across the political spectrum, from *The Leader* to *Sinn Féin* to the *Daily Express* illustrates, there was potential for dialogue and understanding between the two denominational groups, complicating the binary oppositions applied in our understanding of the Revival.

The Leader's call to the Abbey directorate to revise their aesthetic and elitist approach is suggestive. Gregory's play, the review implicitly proposes, had the potential to reach a large audience; the theatre had a 'real' play, but only an ideal audience.¹⁷⁹ *The White Cockade*, arguably, thus suffered from the Abbey's adherence to an upper-class, elitist, and selective audience; the lowering of ticket prices was still to come the following year. The appraisal of Gregory's play as 'subtle art' suggests that an opening of the audience from the classes to the masses was not by necessity to the detriment of aesthetics.¹⁸⁰ As this debate over the Abbey's audience further illustrates, animosities were due to the provenance of an aristocratic rather than a sectarian elitism.

¹⁷⁸ W.G. Fay and Catherine Carswell, *The Fays of the Abbey Theatre: An Autobiographical Record* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1935), p. 148.

¹⁷⁹ On the development and changes in the ILT's and the Abbey's ideology of audience see Paige Reynolds, *Modernism, Drama, and the Audience for Irish Spectacle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

¹⁸⁰ 'Spectator', 'A play and a solitude', *The Leader* (23 December 1905), p. 301.

III

‘To Die Game’: A Class in Decline

I feel that this Land Bill is the last of ‘Dobson’s Three Warnings’ & am thankful that we land owners have been given even a little time to prepare & to work while it is day – It is necessary that as democracy gains power our power should go - & God knows many of our ancestors & forerunners have eaten or planted sour grapes & we must not repine if our teeth are set on edge – I would like to leave a good memory & not a ‘monument of champagne bottles’ - & with all that, I hope to save the *home* – the house & woods at least for Robert.

- Lady Gregory (1895)¹

The days of landed property have passed.

- Lady Gregory (1930)²

‘[I]f we are considering Lady Gregory’s rise in the world,’ suggested George Moore in his third volume of autobiography, *Vale*, in 1914, ‘we must admit that she owes a great deal to her husband’.³ Leaving aside Moore’s generally negative portrayal of Gregory in *Hail and Farewell*, this is a perceptive remark. Reflecting on her life in the summer of 1928, Gregory expressed her gratitude: ‘If he had not given me his name[,] his position, I should not have had so good standing’.⁴ This indicates a marked class consciousness and suggests a continuity of high social standing in a period of time associated with a decline in wealth and power of that echelon. Gregory’s emphasis on ‘name’, ‘position’ and ‘standing’ determine her class allegiance as well as an acknowledgement of the importance of reputation. As the Gregory name was tied to the family seat, the playwright’s class attitudes can be explored in relation to Coole, in her notion of its heritage and value in the past, present and future. ‘There had

¹ Entry for 8 April 1895, James Pethica (ed.), *Lady Gregory’s Diaries 1892-1902* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1996), p. 68. Hereafter abbreviated as *Diaries*.

² Entry for 5 January 1930, in D.J. Murphy (ed.), *Lady Gregory’s Journals: Volume Two, Books 30-44, 21 February 1925-9 May 1932* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1987), pp. 485-486. Hereafter abbreviated as *Journals II*.

³ George Moore, *Vale* (London: William Heinemann, 1914), pp. 174-5.

⁴ Entry for 22 June 1928, *Journals II*, p. 281.

always been a certain distinction about Coole', she remarked in *Seventy Years*.⁵ Gregory's claim to Coole's exceptionalism is based on the fact that the house survived the challenges posed by land agitation, nationalism, as well as social and economic devaluation. The period between 1881 and 1918 has been succinctly described as 'a steep decline in the Irish landlords' power and wealth', a period bookended by the birth and the death of Gregory's son, Robert.⁶

When the newlyweds arrived on 29 July 1880 from their honeymoon, the Gregorys were greeted by tenants and locals. She briefly described the customary welcome event: 'Received at Gort by [the] Canon and Father Shannon & a mob, the temperance band playing, town decorated, a bonfire at the gate, & triumphal arch with "Cead Mile Failthe" at the gate of Coole'.⁷ Her rather snobbish reference to 'a mob' indicates an evolving anxiety concerning the threatening crowds. Such fear was not unjustified as the agrarian movement quickly gained momentum. The Land League was founded in October 1879, led by Michael Davitt, and quickly spread across country. With its demand for rent reductions and the championing of peasant proprietorship, it challenged the power of the landed elite. In conjunction with the later Local Government Act of 1898 and Home Rule, the Land War eroded the landed class's political power whilst also stressing 'their separation from [...] the people'.⁸

Gregory's entrance at Coole was, therefore, overshadowed by contemporary politics, exemplified by an article in the *Irish Times* entitled 'Sir William H. Gregory on the Land Question'. This 'most agreeable evening', arranged for 'the purpose to introduce Lady Gregory' to the tenantry, provided a convenient platform to bring together both sides. In his

⁵ Lady Gregory, *Seventy Years*, ed. Colin Smythe (New York: Macmillan, 1974), p. 25.

⁶ Fergus Campbell, *The Irish Establishment 1879-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 37.

⁷ Judith Hill, *Lady Gregory – An Irish Life* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2005), p. 31. Notably, Gregory misspelled the Irish greeting in her diary.

⁸ John Kelly, 'The Fifth Bell: Race and Class in Yeats's Political Thought', in Okifumi Komesu and Masaru Sekine (eds), *Irish Writers and Politics* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1989), p. 115.

lengthy speech, Sir William stressed his liberal attitude in continuity with the Gregorys' tradition of benevolence at Coole estate for more than 100 years and he proudly proclaimed that 'he was not aware that a single capricious eviction had ever taken place'. He asserted that evictions, however, are justified for non-payment of rent and

in cases where the tenant was incorrigible, and had been ruined by drunkenness or other misconduct. In other cases it had invariably been law with the Coole landlords to support an industrious man who by no fault of his own had been unfortunate and ruined – to try and set him on his legs again.⁹

Accordingly, he perceived the relationship between landlord and tenant to be reciprocal and based on responsibility on both sides. His speech was not only a reassurance, but also a warning to those toying with the idea of joining the League and subscribing to its no-rent campaign.

In such uncertain times, then, a good reputation was pivotal. Sir William stressed the importance of repute when writing to his young wife:

I am very glad indeed that the country people are pleased. Whatever naughty deeds I may have done I always felt the strongest sense of duty towards my tenants, and I have had a great affection for them. They have never in a single instance caused me displeasure, and I know you can and will do everything in your power to make them love and value us.¹⁰

With these lines he ensured that Gregory was aware of her 'duty' and, perhaps in anticipation of her inevitable young widowhood, reminded her of her responsibility to foster the continuance of this hitherto good relationship between landlord and tenant. His wish to be loved and valued suggests that class status was not only a birth right, but needed to be earned if his class's power was to survive. By extension, the upper class depended, to a degree, on its reputation among the lower classes.

⁹ 'Sir William H. Gregory on the Land Question', *Weekly Irish Times* (4 September 1880), p. 5.

¹⁰ Sir William to Lady Gregory quoted in Lennox Robinson (ed.), *Lady Gregory's Journals 1916-1930* (London: Putnam & Company, 1946), p. 11.

By autumn 1881, Sir William noted that ‘the landlord shooting season has set in with great briskness’.¹¹ When Standish O’Grady published his warning to the landed class with *The Crisis in Ireland* the following year, he prophesied that the movement would not avail ‘until the gentry, compelled to fall back under the protection of the military, and to assemble for mutual protection in camps, relinquish their houses and grounds, and the land which they now actually farm, to the tender mercies of lawless mobs’.¹² Indeed, these changes had already reached Gregory’s childhood home. Visiting Roxborough, she wrote to Blunt:

This is a very disturbed part of the country but we have seven soldiers & two policemen in the house for the protection of one of my brothers whose life has been threatened, & there were 9 policemen at the gamekeepers house a little way off so we are supposed to be well taken care of. As a fact however the evening I arrived the 9 soldiers were occupied in drinking whiskey from tea cups. [...] The country round is desolate enough now, so many landlords have gone to live away.¹³

Notably, Coole remained outside of such commentary. Voicing a sense of insecurity among the landed class, as she ‘remember[s] the time when the windows were left open all night’, Gregory assembled various reminiscences in an unpublished essay, ‘An Emigrant’s Notebook’, written between August and December of 1883. ‘[T]he country will never be quite the same again’, she concluded, ‘for good or ill the change has come’.¹⁴

Despite her sympathy for the lower class, exemplified by her anger at the shooting of a local farmer, ‘An Emigrant’s Notebook’ revealed her sense of class distinction. Although admitting to Roxborough’s architectural insignificance, she asked ‘who would build marble halls now to be inhabited by a possible Land Leaguer of the near future?’¹⁵ The ‘marble halls’ symbolize luxurious building material, aesthetics and wealth. Reiterating thereby a tone of

¹¹ Gregory, *Autobiography*, p. 369.

¹² Standish O’Grady, *The Crisis in Ireland* (Dublin: E. Ponsonby, London: Simpkin and Marshall, 1882), p. 13.

¹³ Lady Gregory to Wilfrid Scawen Blunt (24 July 1882), Folder 1, Lady Gregory collection of papers, 1873- [1965] bulk (1873-1932). The Berg Collection of English and American Literature, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations, New York City. Hereafter cited as Berg.

¹⁴ Lady Gregory, ‘An Emigrant’s Notebook’, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Gregory Family Paper, Lady Gregory Papers, Emory University, Box 46, Folder 8, p. 54. Hereafter cited as Emory.

¹⁵ Gregory, ‘An Emigrant’s Notebook’, p. 1. Emory.

superiority, Gregory expressed her view of the landed class as representative of affluence and taste. Similarly, Yeats wrote in his journal on 9th August 1909, in response to the granting of a 20 per cent rent reduction for 15 Coole tenants who had applied to the Land Court, about the idea for the poem that would eventually become ‘Upon a House Shaken by the Land Agitation’:

How should the world gain if this house failed, even though a hundred little houses were the better for it, for here power [has] gone forth or lingered, giving energy, precision [...]? How should the world be better if the wren’s nest flourish and the eagle’s house is scattered?¹⁶

Here, as in Gregory’s diaries and correspondence, the house represents ideals of aesthetics and tradition. Gregory’s reminiscences of ‘An Emigrant’s Notebook’ end on a melancholic and dramatic, yet nonetheless somewhat practical, note when she wishes for ‘sympathy to bind class with class instead of hatred keeping them asunder’. She added, ‘This is the problem we have each to do our best to solve’.¹⁷

However, class attitudes and attachment to tradition were not easily shaken. Blunt, rather begrudgingly, wrote in 1886 that ‘she cared most about [...] the land purchase, so curiously are people swayed by their money interests’.¹⁸ Indeed, Gregory was staunchly opposed to the land reform. ‘We poor landlords with “the sand running in the hour-glass” are resolved at least to die game’, she wrote to Sir Mountstuart Grant Duff in May 1886.¹⁹ Commenting on Gladstone’s indignation at the landlords’ opposition to his legislation, she stated: ‘His compensation is inadequate, his confidence in vain. I cannot sell my child’s birthright for a mess of hasty pudding’.²⁰ Gregory, here, echoes O’Grady who stated in *The*

¹⁶ William Butler Yeats, *Memoirs*, ed. by Denis Donoghue (London: Macmillan, 1972), p. 225.

¹⁷ Gregory, ‘An Emigrant’s Notebook’, p. 54. Emory.

¹⁸ Wilfrid Scawen Blunt quoted in Longford, Elizabeth, ‘Lady Gregory and Wilfrid Scawen Blunt’, in Ann Saddlemyer and Colin Smythe (eds), *Lady Gregory: Fifty Years After* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1987), p. 96. Blunt added: ‘yet in a sense she is more nationalist than anybody, and has certainly done a larger national work for Ireland with her theatre’.

¹⁹ Gregory, *Seventy Years*, p. 66.

²⁰ Entry for 3 May 1886, Diary. Typescript. Part 3. May 3 1886 – Nov. 21, 1886, Typescript carbon, unsigned, 40 p., p. 1, Berg. In July 1921, Gregory remarked in her holograph memoirs on that passage: ‘I was all in arms against [Gladstone] then, and his seizing of our property, the property of my class, my family, my kindred, to

Crisis in Ireland that England hoped ‘to suborn [the landed class] into surrender of its cherished birthright with a mess of pottage’, warning ‘beware how you stir up the fierce hostility of men conscious of a wrong so deep!’²¹ Such belief in access to land as a birthright remained unshaken, as Gregory reflected on politics during the Land War in 1920 at a time she had entered sale negotiations: ‘I do not see that he or I could for any motive save a hope of present ease have joined with Parnell and his men, or consented to give up to grasping hands the lands that had been bought and cultivated and wooded by his great grandfather’.²² What she resented was a neglect of responsibility and duty. ‘I would like to leave a good memory’, she wrote, ‘not a “monument of champagne bottles” – & with all that, I hope to save the *home* – the house & the woods at least for Robert’.²³

With Sir William’s death in 1892, Gregory became the custodian of the estate and, with a heavy heart, she ‘returned to Coole; to the empty house and the tenanted grave’.²⁴ Entering widowhood on the brink of her 40th birthday, what she inherited on her son’s behalf was a highly mortgaged estate that demanded skilled economizing. Whilst demands for rent reductions had curtailed the estate’s income in the 1880s, further land legislation in 1903 and 1909 led to additional sales in late 1914 and negotiations were entered, again, in 1920/21 in the aftermath of Robert Gregory’s death. Lady Gregory effectively became a tenant in 1921, renting back the house and part of the demesne from her widowed daughter-in-law.²⁵ Margaret curtly noted after Gregory’s death that ‘she had grown to think it hers’.²⁶ In fact, Gregory was the key upholder of the familial legacy and subscribed to the duty and responsibility ascribed to her by her husband. During the sale negotiations that started in

smooth a path for England’. Lady Gregory quoted in James Pethica, ‘A Dialogue of Self and Service: Lady Gregory’s Emergence as an Irish Writer and Partnership with W.B. Yeats’, Wolfson College, Oxford 1987 (unpublished PhD thesis), p. 133.

²¹ O’Grady, *The Crisis in Ireland*, p. 37.

²² Entry for 6 March 1920, D.J. Murphy (ed.), *Lady Gregory’s Journals: Volume One, Books 1-29, 10 October 1916- 24 February 1925* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1978), p. 332. Hereafter abbreviated *Journals II*.

²³ Entry for 8 April 1895, *Diaries*, p. 68.

²⁴ Gregory, *Seventy Years*, p. 263.

²⁵ Hill, *Lady Gregory*, pp. 239, 276-277, 315.

²⁶ Margaret Gregory to Constant Huntington (1945) quoted in *Journals II*, p. 641.

early 1920, Gregory, echoing her husband's narrative of continuity, renewed her claim to Coole's exceptionalism by drawing attention

to the fact that through all the troublesome times of the last forty years we have never had to ask compensation from the County or for police protection. We have been, in comparison with many other Estates, the centre of peace and goodwill. This was in part owing to the liberal opinions and just dealing of my husband and of my son, and in part to the good behaviour of the majority of our late tenants.²⁷

Her aim remained to 'save the place and house'.²⁸ Persistently proclaiming that Richard, her grandson, 'inherits a fine tradition', she willingly took on 'this increased responsibility' as what 'once gone, sold, dismantled, could never be regained'.²⁹ Keeping Coole, however, was a financial struggle. Gregory continuously commented on her income, highlighting the economic devaluation. Thus, in May 1920 she remarked that 'times change and we must lighten the ship'.³⁰ A few months later, she wrote: 'my figures are not very encouraging – with my certain income not much over £500'.³¹ However, she proudly commented in April 1928: 'I have been paying all these last years, [...] my plays & books have carried me through'.³²

Writing retrospectively on the founding of the Abbey Theatre in *Our Irish Theatre* (1913), Gregory quoted Aubrey de Vere's letter as the first response to the subscription for the Irish Literary Theatre:

Whatever develops the genius of Ireland, must in the most effectual way benefit her; and in Ireland's genius I have long been a strong believer. Circumstances of very various sorts have hitherto tended much to retard the development of that genius; but it cannot fail to make itself recognised before very long, and Ireland will have cause for gratitude to all those who have hastened to the coming of that day.³³

²⁷ Lady Gregory to Sir Henry Doran (23 April 1920), *Journals I*, p. 150.

²⁸ Entry for 11 July 1920, *Journals I*, p. 180.

²⁹ Entry for 1 August 1921, *Journals I*, p. 283.

³⁰ Entry for 8 May 1920, *Journals I*, p. 156.

³¹ Entry for 11 July 1920, *Journals I*, p. 180.

³² Retrospective comment on Entry for 14 January 1921, *Journals I*, p. 219.

³³ Lady Augusta Gregory, *Our Irish Theatre* (New York/London, 1913), p. 10.

The ‘genius’ de Vere referred to was a cultural one, and Gregory’s use of that quotation reflects a shift from the political to the cultural sphere. Subtly, she positioned herself at the top of the list of those Ireland should be grateful for – next to Yeats and Synge – her co-founders of the Abbey. Thus, the continuity of the Gregory family’s stature would be maintained and lead as an example of the continuous importance of that social stratum for Irish culture – if not for Irish politics.

In October 1922, Gregory quoted a review of James Ritchie’s *The Influence of Man on Animal Life in Scotland* (1920):

Nature exterminates an animal: long she seems to ponder over the process, slowly the conditions creep in which render existence more difficult, time gives many opportunities for changing a habit, even for modifying a structure, so that new adaptation may turn aside the threat of extinction, only to incompetence of adjustment does nature mete out its reward.

Poignantly, she added: ‘(And this applies to us landlords.)’³⁴ As Gregory’s career as founder of the Abbey and prolific playwright suggests, she was more than capable of adjustment. Indeed, when the theatre’s patent application was challenged, Yeats sent a wire to Gregory urging her to become the patentee as she was a ‘resident of good standing’.³⁵ Equally, when the Abbey was in need of funds, Gregory hosted an ‘At Home’ at the theatre in November 1910 and among over ninety guests were those of the higher social order such as Lord and Lady Lyttelton, Lord and Lady Plunket, Lady Ardilaun, Lady Kenmare, Hon. Mrs. Ernest Guinness and Lady Robinson.³⁶ This complicates Lennox Robinson’s claim that ‘Her Theatre was a People’s Theatre’ in which ‘she would not lay herself open to an accusation of snobbery, of trying to enlist the fickle sympathies of the important and the rich’.³⁷

The Abbey was not only an institution onto which Gregory as a member of the landed class had shifted her power, it also gave her the opportunity of a career that provided her with

³⁴ Entry for 6 October 1922, *Journals I*, p. 150.

³⁵ Yeats quoted in Hill, *An Irish Life*, p. 185.

³⁶ ‘Lady Gregory “At Home” at the Abbey Theatre’, *The Irish Times* (22 November 1910), p. 8.

³⁷ Lennox Robinson in Robinson (ed.), *Lady Gregory’s Journals 1916-1930*, p. 198.

the financial means to keep hold of the landed tradition of Coole. Whilst Gregory's comedies became Abbey staples, this chapter considers lesser known and less successful plays. These neglected dramas of Gregory's oeuvre demonstrate that Coole and the Gregory legacy remained one of her key preoccupations until the end of her life. They also provide insight into the playwright's elitism. Whenever ascendancy heritage was challenged, Gregory took to her pen and, through her drama, explored her notions of class and vision for Coole's future. *Shanwalla* was written at a time when the Gregorys were negotiating the sale of the property. As the estate diminished more and more, this play presents us with an idealized version of landlord-tenant relations that echo Sir William's vision of a reciprocal relationship based on responsibility and trust. Both *The Dragon* and *The Jester* emerge with the birth of the Irish revolution in the aftermath of Easter 1916 as well as Gregory's personal loss with her son dying during the war effort. Dedicated to her grandchildren, these wonder plays escape from the harsh realities into a utopian vision of Coole's future. Her meditation on the themes of marriage and education highlight the blending of her liberal, patriarchal, and conservative class politics. *Dave*, written after Ireland gained independence, expands her utopian vision to include the newly founded Free State in which the landed class was no longer a key player. At the time the Abbey became a state subsidized theatre, Gregory abdicated from class responsibility.

‘A Hardy Class’: *Shanwalla* (1915)

‘[H]orses in this country is a hardy class’, says the character Lawrence Scarry, a stableman, in Gregory's three-act play about a racehorse, *Shanwalla*.³⁸ The association of the animal with ‘a hardy class’ is a potent one. In his play *The Hostage* (1958), Brendan Behan defined

³⁸ Lady Gregory, *Shanwalla*, in Lady Gregory, *The Collected Plays, III, The Wonder and Supernatural Plays*, ed. Ann Saddlemyer (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1979), pp. 53-97; p. 60. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text, abbreviated *CPIII*.

an Anglo-Irishman as '[a] Protestant with a horse'. Differentiating between an 'ordinary' Protestant who works, the Anglo-Irishman, as presented by Behan, 'only works at riding horses, drinking whiskey, and reading double-meaning books in Irish at Trinity College'.³⁹ Their class is thus privy to a life of leisure, with ample access to privilege, wealth and power, all of which, Behan implied, are symbolized by a horse. The 'hardy class' Gregory refers to in her play is, hence, linked to the Protestant landed class and despite the changes in Irish society in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, she suggests, this class's power cannot easily be shaken.

The relationship between horses – animals associated with nobility, strength, grace and speed – and their owners as well as between the owners and those employed such as stablemen, for example, can function as a literary trope through which class relations in Ireland are explored. The horse stands as the testing ground for the trust, inter-dependence and responsibility between the master of a big house, Hubert Darcy, and his stableman, Lawrence Scarry. Their relationship is put to the test as two locals, James Brogan and Pat O'Malley, intervene and plan to dope the horse prior to an upcoming race. Brogan, caught in the act of meddling with Shanwalla's food by Scarry's wife, murders the woman to protect the secret. When the stableman is summoned to Court and charged with poisoning the horse, the ghost of his wife appears and facilitates Brogan's confession, restoring the battered relationship of trust between Master and stableman.

Summarized after its premiere on 8 April 1915 in the *Irish Independent* as a 'play about a horse and a ghost', its supernatural element outweighed any commentary on the context of class and inter-class relations as the primary undercurrent.⁴⁰ For instance, George Bernard Shaw, the greatest admirer of the play, claimed that it was 'the best ghost play he

³⁹ Brendan Behan, *The Hostage*, in Brendan Behan, *The Complete Plays* (New York: Grove Press, 1978), pp. 127-237; p. 143.

⁴⁰ 'Jacques', "'Shanwalla" at the Abbey – Play about a horse and a ghost', *Irish Independent* (9 April 1915), p. 4.

ever saw'.⁴¹ *The Times* commented that 'The play is impressive and powerful, both as drama and in its relation to the supernatural'.⁴² The *Irish Times* noted that it was 'in its relation to the supernatural that the play presents most novelty'.⁴³ Yet despite the presence of superstitious beliefs and the benefits of a connection to another world, it is the drama's eponymous racehorse and its metaphoric and symbolic value that allows insight into Gregory's class attitudes as it presents the only plot featuring an Anglo-Irishman of landed wealth and one of his subordinates.

The racehorse establishes two central links. Firstly, it symbolizes ownership of land, and ownership of Coole estate in particular as Shanwalla is the name of one of the seven woods at Coole. Second, in its more overt meaning, it is not only linked to proprietary wealth but also to potential and real loss of such when viewed in the context of Sir William's involvement with the turf. In this context, the horse becomes a metaphor for failure, loss of land and financial debt. Sir William Gregory attended his first race at the Epsom Derby in 1839 at the age of 22 and bought his first racehorse soon after.⁴⁴ As John Kent writes, Sir William 'was at once admitted to the best society in the United Kingdom, and soon became a prominent pillar of the English Turf'.⁴⁵ Whilst still a student at Oxford, Gregory had instructed the prominent trainer William Trean to purchase yearlings for him, and he adopted his own racing colours of a red shirt with a white stripe and a white cap. In the early 1840s, the turf proved profitable. He earned over £2,500 in prize money in 1842 and more than £2000 the following year. Indeed, he was listed among 'the principal noblemen and gentry'

⁴¹ Lady Gregory to William Butler Yeats (16 April 1915) quoted in Dan H. Laurence and Nicholas Grene (eds), *Shaw, Lady Gregory and the Abbey* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1993), p. 91.

⁴² 'Lady Gregory's New Play. "Shanwalla" produced in Dublin.', *The Times* (9 April 1915), p. 11.

⁴³ 'Abbey Theatre – Lady Gregory's New Play', *The Irish Times* (9 April 1915), p. 8.

⁴⁴ John Kent, *Racing Life of Lord George Cavendish Bentinck, M.P. and Other Reminiscences*, ed. by Francis Lawley (Edinburgh/London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1892), p. 366.

⁴⁵ Kent, *Racing Life*, p. 366. Gregory quotes from the *Racing Life* in the chapter about her marriage in *Seventy Years*. She emphasises those parts concerning Sir William's high social standing and refrains from any mentioning of financial losses. See Gregory, *Seventy Years*, pp. 21-22.

involved in 1843, a year in which he was 15th out of 29 leading winning owners.⁴⁶ When one of his horses brought in prize money exceeding £3000 in 1847, it was his last great triumph.

This initial period of spectacular success, and the desire for its continuance, turned into a financial disaster, followed by public humiliation, and Sir William noted in his autobiography that ‘I regret to say that very soon Newmarket and the great race meetings began to exercise a far stronger attraction than politics or society’.⁴⁷ From the late 1840s onwards, his racing debts accumulated. Although he had to borrow money for household items, Christmas gifts and other daily expenses in the 1850s, Sir William, rather self-indulgently and without much distress, wrote in January 1852:

I am quite flattered of the high terms in which the money lenders talk of me. [...] it is reserved for me evidently to restore Irish credit in the financial world – I feel surprised and delighted with my prowess when I look on the number of bills taken up, and survey the broad sheet of the Derby book which is looking better every change.⁴⁸

Yet his financial situation was no laughing matter, when one of his cheques was dishonoured and he was forced to borrow from friends such as Sir Robert Peel.⁴⁹ Eventually, his financial crisis became a public affair as one of his friends, Edmund O’Flaherty, was said to have left the country on account of extensive forgeries. Sir William was called to give witness in June 1855, an incident that finds brief mention in his *Autobiography* in a chapter poignantly titled ‘Misspent years’ in which he writes that ‘An action was tried against me in Dublin on two of these bills. It lasted two days, and the jury almost immediately gave a verdict in my favour’.⁵⁰ Gregory admitted on the witness stand ‘that he had lost £5,000 on a single race in 1854 and that he did not know the extent of his liabilities on bills of exchange’, highlighting the

⁴⁶ Brian Jenkins, *Sir William Gregory of Coole: The Biography of an Anglo-Irishman* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1986), p. 97.

⁴⁷ Sir William Gregory, *Sir William Gregory, K.C.M.G. – Formerly Member of Parliament and Sometime Governor of Ceylon – An Autobiography*, edited by Lady Gregory, 2nd edition (London: John Murray, 1894), p. 118.

⁴⁸ Sir William Gregory quoted in Jenkins, *Sir William Gregory*, p. 102.

⁴⁹ Jenkins, *Sir William Gregory*, p. 103.

⁵⁰ Gregory, *Autobiography*, p. 143.

magnitude of his predicament.⁵¹ Sir William realized that there was ‘only one course left to me, instantly to abandon the turf altogether, to face all my liabilities, to sell sufficient land to pay off all charges on the estate’.⁵² Although he withdrew from the turf, his inheritance remained close to ruin as the estate was encumbered with £50,000 and, together with the Famine relief and his accrued racing debts, his arrears had doubled by 1855. The two possible options were either to marry a woman of substantial wealth or to sell the property.⁵³

Following the sale in the Encumbered Estates Court in January 1857 and further private sales, more than £50,000 was raised. Yet the income was insufficient and the estate brought in less than it swallowed. By 1865, Sir William’s mother bought what remained of the estate – about 5,000 acres out of what had once been an inheritance of over 15,000 acres – for £12,000 and it ‘protected the estate and secured the most valuable part of it to me, together with the demesne of Coole’.⁵⁴ Sir William noted that it had been

a time of struggle and humiliation, during which I abandoned society and public life for the turf only, during which I became deeply involved, chiefly through liabilities for friends, and during which I was forced to sell two-thirds of my ancestral estate. But at last, by a strong effort, I turned over a new leaf, and, though a poor man, became a free man, and once more in my right mind.⁵⁵

Horse racing, thus, was a delicate topic in the Gregory family. Sir William’s involvement had directly resulted in the curtailment of the landed inheritance as a result of recklessness and irresponsibility. By focusing in *Shanwalla* on a racehorse and its owner, Gregory returned to this rather forgotten part of family history; the relationship between master and stableman presents an allegory for the relationship between landlord and tenant. With, perhaps, a critical eye on her husband’s neglect of service and duty, and the consequent jeopardy of the inheritance, she bemoans the fact that she took over a highly mortgaged estate upon his death.

⁵¹ Jenkins, *Sir William Gregory*, pp. 104-105.

⁵² Gregory, *Autobiography*, p. 148.

⁵³ Jenkins, *Sir William Gregory*, p. 105, 107.

⁵⁴ Jenkins, *Sir William Gregory*, p. 107; Gregory, *Autobiography*, p. 148.

⁵⁵ Gregory, *Autobiography*, pp. 147-148.

The autobiographical link to the Coole estate is further strengthened by the play's context. The first holograph draft of the play, dated from 26th July to 18th August 1914, was written at a time of further negotiations regarding the sale of the property.⁵⁶ 'Robert is in a tangle of trouble over the estate', wrote Gregory to John Quinn on 4th August 1914, 'We had agreed to sell when the promised Land Bill comes in, and now they say the war will put it off for years and the tenants are restless, and we must probably sell at a heavy loss'.⁵⁷ The Congested Districts Board (CDB) had already made an offer to buy Coole, its tenanted and untenanted land as well as the house and demesne in December 1912, the year in which the third Home Rill was introduced into Parliament. Gregory and her son had declined the offer. By autumn 1914, a less attractive proposition was made that excluded the house and demesne, but as the tenants had not paid rent since May of that year, they agreed to the terms offered by the CDB. The sale was concluded and 1353 acres remained out of over 5000.⁵⁸

Gregory's emphasis on Coole's uniqueness within the area, based on hitherto good landlord-tenant relations, is echoed in the play. Shanwalla, it is said, is 'a great sort. He is far beyond any one of the blood horses will be in' the race (*CP* 74). Significantly, early drafts of the play written between August and late November bear the initial title of 'The Helper', placing the emphasis on the ghost of the wife in her role as messenger during the final act of the play.⁵⁹ Although it is not exactly when Gregory altered the title, the dates on the holograph drafts indicate that the change was not made until November 1914. Thus, the alteration occurred after the sale of Coole had been agreed in September. With the change in title, the playwright shifted the focus to the horse, and, in naming it after a part of the estate,

⁵⁶ [Shanwalla]. Holograph outlines (3) 1914 July 26 – 1914 Aug. 18, ms. 3v., Berg.

⁵⁷ Lady Gregory to John Quinn (4 August 1914) quoted in James Pethica, 'Yeats's "perfect man"', *The Dublin Review*, no. 35 (Summer 2009), p. 21.

⁵⁸ Hill, *An Irish Life*, pp. 276-277.

⁵⁹ See [Shanwalla]. The helper. Holograph draft 1914 Aug. 28 – 1914 Sept. 16. ms., 1. v.; Holograph draft 1914 Sept. 24 – 1914 Oct. 17, ms., 1v.; Holograph draft 1914 Oct. 29 – 1914 Nov. 25, ms., 2 v., Berg.

its significance regarding the future of Coole and a concern for landlord-tenant relations becomes apparent.

In light of this, the play focuses on the relationship between Hubert Darcy and his stableman, Lawrence Scarry. *The Observer* noted that ‘the men were friends as well as employer and employed’.⁶⁰ Indeed, it is remarked in the play that they ‘were two comrade lads in [...] young days, as near as the tree to the bark’, suggesting that they grew up on the estate and, possibly, replicating their fathers’ positions (*CP III* 62). This intermingling between the classes echoes Gregory’s short story, ‘A Gentleman’, in which the owner of the Big House, Sir Gerald, was taught sheep shearing and fishing as a boy by the estate’s gardener, O’Loughlin, who worked on the estate for sixty years.⁶¹ However, their friendship is not based on an equal footing and a variety of interdependencies is at work. Most importantly, Scarry’s livelihood and standard of living depends on his master:

- SCARRY. The time she was a poor serving girl in your own kitchen she was better treated than to be housed under rafters in a loft.
- DARCY. A loft is an airy place.
- SCARRY. A loft the crowd wouldn’t stop in, but to be going in and out of it with the breeze.
- DARCY. It to be airy you will not be stopping in it wasting your time of a morning.
- SCARRY. It is gone to rack too. It was made since God made the world. It’s as old as Adam. There’s a great traffic in it of rats, till they have it holed like sieve.
- DARCY. Holes are very handy for you to be looking down into the manger to see is Shanwalla eating his feed.
- SCARRY. And no way to go up in it but only a rickety ladder does be shaking like a bough in a big wind.
- DARCY. That is great good. It will keep you sober more than if you have your oath to the missionaries. You would be in dread to go face it and you after taking a drop.
- SCARRY. I tell you I wouldn’t care if I had to climb a rope to the skies if it wasn’t for my woman of a wife.
- DARCY. I’m not too well pleased with you, Larry, for bringing in a companion till after the race would be won. Take care would she be chattering about the horse.

⁶⁰ ‘Shanwalla’, *The Observer* (23 May 1915), p. 7.

⁶¹ Lady Augusta Gregory [Angus Grey], ‘A Gentleman’, *Argosy: a magazine of tales, travels, essays, and poems* (July 1894), p. 72.

SCARRY. You need be in no dread. Wise head and shut mouth. That's the way with her (*CP*III 59).

Scarry's living conditions stand in stark contrast to Darcy's lifestyle in the Big House that encompasses the entertaining of the landed gentry. The Anglo-Irishman's responses, indicative of a stereotypical view of the Irish, overtly demonstrate his self-interest. Indeed, his reasoning suggests that the plain housing, in need of refurbishment and improvement, is justified in that it prevents laziness and a fondness for drink, advocating the view that economic inequalities nurture morals.

Despite their social and economic inequality, however, they depend on one another, and that dependence is based on responsibility, trust and service. Scarry, entrusted to take care of and look after the welfare of Darcy's precious racehorse, will profit as much from Shanwalla's victory at the upcoming Inchy race as his master. Both men believe in the horse into which they have invested time and money. 'There's a good breed in him', Scarry says to his master, 'You may bet your estate on Shanwalla. [...] Shanwalla that will get the victory over all Ireland' (*CP*III 58). Just as the stableman is convinced the horse will bring in a coup, so is its owner. 'He to win', Darcy notes, 'I'll have my pocket well filled. And believe me, you'll be no loser' (*CP*III 59). Shanwalla's success depends as much on the master's money to finance its upkeep and training as it does on the stableman's responsibility and charge; both will profit from their joint effort. Likewise, landlord and tenant merge their respective abilities and duties. Tenants, in working their land and adhering to the payments of their rents, supply the landlord with the necessary income to uphold the status of and contribute to the improvement of an estate. In the play, for instance, Darcy provides provisions for Bride's wake, including the candles (*CP*III 72).

Darcy, worried that something might upset the horse, demands: 'Give no one leave to touch or to handle him. It is a little thing would put a horse astray' (*CP*III 60). His repeated insistence that Scarry should be particularly careful alerts the stableman that his master might

not have faith in his charge: ‘I wonder you wouldn’t shift him over to your own yard and you being so uneasy’ (*CPIII* 60). Following Darcy’s admittance that ‘It’s hard to trust anyone’, the two enter a heated debate:

SCARRY. Look here now Master Hubert. You’ll bring him out of this tonight or I myself will go out of it.
 DARCY. What are you talking about?
 SCARRY. I will not stop in charge of him, and I not to be trusted.
 DARCY. Who said you were not trusted?
 SCARRY. You said it now.
 DARCY. I did not.
 SCARRY. I say that you did. [...] I’ll put up with it no longer.
 DARCY. All right so. You can go tomorrow.
 SCARRY. I’ll go here and now.
 DARCY. You cannot till tomorrow. I have no one to care the horse tonight. [...]
 SCARRY. If I do stop it is not to oblige you Mr. Darcy, but because I have a great regard for that horse. (*CPIII* 61)

Scarry’s reaction displays pride in his work. His ultimate subservience, he is eager to emphasise, is motivated by his care for the animal rather than a subordination to his master. Once more, Darcy’s self-regard comes to the fore but not without a latent acknowledgement of his dependence on the stableman.

Following their falling out, Scarry bursts ‘*ostentatiously*’ into song:

The lands he did forsake, and swarm across the lake
 But to his great mistake the hounds kept him in view,
 Our County Galway joy
 Is Persse of Castleboy... (*CPIII* 62)

The verse is taken from an old poem that had appeared in the *Tuam Herald* in January 1907 and was re-quoted in *The Story of an Irish Property*. It records the key families who took part in the Galway Blazers who went hunting in the area around Lough Cutra and addresses ‘You County Galway sportsmen, Hibernians’ noble kin’.⁶² The lines in the play relate to the ‘downfall’ of ‘Poor Reynard’, leading to his death. Among the surnames mentioned is

⁶² Robert S. Rait, *The Story of An Irish Property* (Oxford: Privately Printed at the University Press, 1908), p. 119. Although there is no direct evidence that Gregory read this book, it can be assumed that she did as Rait quotes extensively from her translations of Irish legends and it is likely that he sent her a copy.

Darcy.⁶³ Here, it functions as a warning or threat to Darcy: the horse can lead to victory as much as it can lead to loss. Thus, in anger, Scarry announces to Brogan and O'Malley that Darcy 'went too far in the way he went on' (*CPIII* 62).

As the review in *The Irish Times* noted, Scarry 'is a faithful and devoted, if hot-tempered, servant'.⁶⁴ Telling Bride Scarry of their fight earlier in the day, Darcy equally admits to a temper:

BRIDE.	He has a great respect for you.
DARCY.	So have I a great respect for him. But I am not without a spirit of my own, and some of these days he'll maybe go too far. [...] I'd be glad you to keep a watch on him, and to quieten him down any time he will be getting these high notions into his head, and make him keep that sharp tongue of his in order.
BRIDE.	I will do that, sir. He would be sorry to give you any annoyance. He thinks the world and all of you.
DARCY.	And another thing. Any time he might be cross or have a drop taken, or be anyway put out at all, let you keep him out of my way, for I'd be sorry to have words with him again, or any quarrel at all (<i>CPIII</i> 69).

Aware of exactly what behaviour brings him to rage, Darcy, in order to avoid future arguments, wishes to engage in dialogue or interaction only when his stableman behaves and acts in a particular way. Thus, he does not tolerate being challenged and disapproves of drinking. Although he acknowledges these elements as part of Scarry's character, he distinctly wishes not to see them or engage with them. Bride Scarry is eager to smooth the upset between the two, and in her demeanour she accepts existing class distinctions. For instance, she abuses James Brogan: 'For you did not deal right and fair with them that trusted you and employed you' (*CPIII* 67). Here, Gregory outlines her ideal landlord-tenant relationship that is based on respect, trust, service and fairness; it is reciprocal.

Trust, in fact, becomes the major theme of the play and is at the core of the relationship between Scarry and Darcy:

⁶³ Rait, *The Story of An Irish Property*, 120.

⁶⁴ 'Abbey Theatre – Lady Gregory's New Play', *The Irish Times* (9 April 1915), p. 8.

DARCY. You were put out, Larry, a while ago at me saying I was uneasy about the horse.
 LARRY. He is your own property.
 DARCY. That's not it, but there are things you don't understand.
 SCARRY. It's likely enough I have bad understanding.
 DARCY. There's a bad class of people going through the world.
 SCARRY. I don't need understanding to know that much.
 DARCY. Have done with humbugging. I have been given sure information that there will be an attempt made against Shanwalla.
 SCARRY. Let them do their best. The ruffians!
 DARCY. Do you see now that it is best to bring him over to my own yard? But I depend on you to come along with him. I have no one I could trust him with but yourself. (*CPIII* 70)

The horse is at the heart of their relationship and dictates its parameters. The word 'property' strengthens the link between horse and land, Shanwalla and Coole. Darcy singles out Scarry as the only person he can trust. Endowed with such responsibility, it provides Scarry with a sense of power in his own right. Thus, he shows the key of the stable to Brogan, saying: 'Darcy gave it into my hand, and he gave with it full leave to go in at any minute of the night or day. Was that now mistrusting me?' (*CPIII* 74). Neither class can function without the other. Gregory noted in the early 1920s that 'I, alone, can only go on living here if I have the goodwill of the people, and indeed I have done nothing to lose or lessen it'.⁶⁵ The landed class depended on the trust endowed to them by the lower classes.

The trust, on which their friendship and dependency is based, is put to the test when Pat O'Malley and James Brogan conspire to dope the horse 'at whose bidding the noblest of the animals shows up mankind at its crookest'.⁶⁶ The two hide behind a hedge until Darcy leaves the scene and their curious, yet suspicious, behaviour and questioning immediately suggests ulterior motives. Driven by their greed, they have taken an interest in Darcy's racehorse which has become the principal topic of local gossip. 'There is surely some great treasure in this old kennel of a place', Brogan says, 'that he has no mind to let slip from him. His eyes stuck to the window and his ears to the hinges of the lock', highlighting Darcy's fear that

⁶⁵ Entry for 20 August 1921, *Journals I*, p. 287.

⁶⁶ J.E.A., 'Gaiety Theatre – "Shanwalla" and "Sovereign Love"', *The Manchester Guardian* (21 April 1915), p. 4.

appears to border on paranoia (*CP III* 62). By implication, they view Darcy as a selfish, secretive and oppressive master who has only his own profit in mind.

However, their keen interest in Shanwalla reveals their own agenda: 'I wonder now is the horse as good as what they say?', asks Brogan (*CP III* 62). Brogan feigns to know 'More than you think' of the horse, despite Darcy's strict code of secrecy and the fact that it was trained only within the demesne (*CP III* 63). It is the master himself, Brogan suggests, whose actions betray more than words:

To be looking down as if there was a secret between yourself and the depths of the earth, and to be whispering with yourself and starting, and to be giving little hints about some thing you could tell if you had a mind; and to be as if deaf and dumb every time the race is so much as spoken of. That's what makes the lads that meet him full sure he has the winner in his hand. There's not a man within the seven counties but has got wind of him. (*CP III* 64)

Brogan proposes that Scarry, in order to draw a profit from the race, should bid against Shanwalla. His companion, O'Malley, notes that 'If God allotted riches for some people and allotted more to be in poverty' it is justifiable 'for a man to look out for himself' (*CP III* 64-65). Indeed, as the audience learns later, O'Malley is driven by deprivation: 'It was poverty brought me to it, and the children rising around me' (*CP III* 96). He tells of a man who, previously in debt, 'grew into riches and is his own master' now as a consequence of his involvement in horse racing; it represents a reversal of Sir William's experience (*CP III* 65). In an alternative version of the third act, one of the policemen attests to O'Malley's dilemma, saying 'he is poor and has debts down on him'. O'Malley's desperation excuses, to an extent, his immoral conduct. Brogan, on the other hand, acts out of greed alone and 'has the name of being a wild card'.⁶⁷ In order to better their own situation, they concoct a plan to bring friction between Scarry and Darcy.

To this end, they jeer Scarry's pride in order to rouse his anger which may tempt him to participate in their plan to sabotage the horse and, thereby, turn a profit at the upcoming race.

⁶⁷ Lady Gregory, *The Image and Other Plays* (New York/London: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1922), p. 194.

‘Darcy doesn’t give you such good treatment you should be slaving your life out for him the way you do’, Brogan tells Scarry, inciting him to work against his master (*CPIII* 65).

However, Scarry is not easily convinced when challenged by Brogan and O’Malley regarding Darcy’s mistreatment of him in the aftermath of his wife’s wake:

SCARRY. He did not. He behaved fair and square to me.
BROGAN. That’s very good. It is the neighbours I heard talking, saying that
 he someway mistrusted you.
SCARRY. He behaved good and honest. He said to me to move over to his
 own yard so soon as I would have done.... this business here. It is
 there I should be going at this time.
BROGAN. They are saying he tried to bring back the trainer from the
 Curragh in your place, and that he would give you no more leave
 to attend the horse. (*CPIII* 74)

Brogan makes fun of Scarry’s subservience saying ‘*sneeringly*’ ‘You are very faithful to Hubert Darcy’ (*CPIII* 75). Scarry’s trust in his master, however, appears unshakable:

BROGAN. I am saying you maybe think too much of Darcy.
SCARRY. He is my master and my near friend. He will never be
 hurted or harmed by enemy or illwisher so long as I’ll be
 living in the world.
BROGAN. A pity he not to have been faithful to yourself.
SCARRY. He to say a sharp word to me, it is short till he would
 come back to make it up with me in some friendly way.
 (*CPIII* 75)

Accepting that harsh words may occasionally be spoken, they are both forgiving and quickly reconvene their friendship. Brogan, fearing that his plan is at risk, goes to the extreme when he puts forward the lie that Darcy ‘was offering temptation to your wife!’ (*CPIII* 75).

Finally, Scarry, raised to anger, vows that ‘Ill drag Darcy down! [...] I’ll go do my revenge’ (*CPIII* 77). Brogan’s plan appears to have succeeded:

SCARRY. I’ll make an attack on him at the racecourse in the sight of all!
BROGAN. You will not. You will draw down on him a surer punishment
 than that. To put him back, and to lessen his means, // and to
 bring down his pride, till he will quit the country being vexed
 and ashamed. (*CPIII* 76-77)

Brogan's remark displays his jealousy of Darcy and his financial security; he later admits that 'it was for my own profit I did injury'.⁶⁸ Not only does he aim to curtail Darcy's material superiority, but he wants to humiliate him so that he is forced to 'quit the country'. Such humiliation, arguably, can be linked to memories of the Land War. In August 1880, Sir William remarked that he dreaded 'that all may be changed in a day by some of these violent agitators, who lash the tenant classes into a fury even against the best landlords'.⁶⁹ Brogan's success in 'making up that story' comes as a surprise to O'Malley. 'A foolish man he should be to give credit to it', he concludes, 'and he knowing Darcy so well as what he does' (*CP III* 79). As in *Spreading the News*, talk and gossip, albeit deliberate in *Shanwalla*, lead the characters astray. On the night Brogan and O'Malley plan to recruit Scarry to go to the stables to tamper with the horse's food; however, the ghost of Bride Scarry returns as her husband lies sleeping 'to save him from doing a great wrong' (*CP III* 79). 'That plan of revenge is as if gone from my mind', Scarry says when woken by Brogan, 'I have no desire to hurt or to harm any person at all' (*CP III* 81).

Set at the Magistrate's court in Darcy's office, the third act opens with Shanwalla's owner awaiting to determine who poisoned his horse in order to sentence the villain accordingly. The horse's owner is shocked, when he faces the main suspect:

DARCY.	Who are you going to charge so?
CONSTABLE.	It is Lawrence Scarry.
DARCY.	Scarry! ... <i>My</i> Lawrence Scarry!
CONSTABLE.	The same one.
DARCY.	Rubbish! You might as well say that I myself did it!

(*CP III* 86)

Darcy even goes as far as not wanting to believe in Scarry's unfaithfulness to him when he states that 'If I thought it possible – but I don't – that he had gone out of his wits and done such a thing I would sooner withdraw the case than have it proved against him!' (*CP III* 86).

⁶⁸ Gregory, *The Image and Other Plays*, p. 220.

⁶⁹ Gregory, *Autobiography*, p. 369.

Scarry, coming into the office, is equally taken by surprise hearing the charge against him. Just like Darcy, the stableman puts all his trust in his employer and master, thus putting his future liberty in his hands:

It is Mr. Darcy is my master. I take orders from no other one. [...] Let you keep that thought for robbers and lawbreakers! I'm not one of that class! I never gave a summons or got a summons or gave my oath in a court! [...] Whatever you have against me or make out against me, it is Mr. Darcy is well able to bring a man from the gallows! (*CPIII* 91)

Thus, Scarry's predicament is dependent on Darcy's disposition and whether he believes in the trust and respect of their relationship or whether he is swayed by false evidence. Most potently, when facing the law, the lower class's dependence on their reputation among the landed class was pivotal. As discussed in Chapter One, in June 1888, a group of moonlighters was arrested in Gregory's neighbourhood, including two of her tenants. Relatives of the imprisoned made their way to Coole Park, 'appealing to my sympathy and expecting me to effect a release in some way'. Believing in the innocence of one tenant, she wrote to the magistrate to secure his acquittal. What becomes clear from Scarry's assertion is, however, that he accepts his lower-class status and, to an extent, embraces it with obedience and pride. Equally, Gregory's tenant, she proudly noted, 'when his mother asked him if he had been frightened when he was in the dock' responded "'Not at all, when I saw the Magistrate reading a letter with Coole Park [...] on the top"'.⁷⁰ Darcy's trust, however, wanes as he realizes that only himself and Scarry had a key to the stable and that the stableman's alibi is unproven. The plot of lies thickens when Brogan accuses Scarry of the murder of his wife (*CPIII* 93).

Appealing to his employer's common sense – just as Gregory's tenants appealed to her and their shared history – Scarry addresses Darcy directly, asking 'Is it that *you* give belief to what was said?' 'God knows I would give half of my estate to have the same thought

⁷⁰ Gregory, *Seventy Years*, p. 231.

of you I had yesterday', Darcy responds, 'You never would hear a sharp word from me again'.⁷¹ In this additional dialogue from the third act as printed in Gregory's *The Image and Other Plays*, the landowner's willingness to give up 'half of [his] estate' in order to keep the relationship he has with his stableman illustrates Gregory's own sentiment at a time when more than half of Coole's remaining land changed hands. With Irish society on the brink of revolution, the playwright was conscious of her class's landed wealth. Darcy's proposition to trade land for a relieved conscience equally suggests Gregory's continued optimism and hope for the future relationship between herself, her family and the locals. Regarding the sale of Coole, Gregory wrote to Blunt in December 1914: 'Robert has been very patient and conciliatory, and after a year or so I hope we shall get on all right'.⁷²

Throughout the play, it is emphasised that Darcy and Scarry have one thing in common: their concern for and protectiveness of the horse, Shanwalla. The *Irish Independent* commented rather sarcastically that 'The night of the day [Bride Scarry] was buried the widower was as much grieved as a Scotchman who had followed a sixpence. He talked more about Shanwalla than he did about Bride'.⁷³ Yet their motivations differ. Whilst for Darcy it is valued property that can bring in money, winning him prestige among the elite circles, for Scarry it is being in charge of Shanwalla that earns him the trust of his master. This trust between owner of the horse and the stableman, and between the stableman and the animal, allows for no outsiders to intrude. It is a triangular relationship which can be seen to reflect the relationship between tenant/farmer, landlord and land. There is no room for middlemen or the greediness of those aspiring to the middle class, such as Brogan.

⁷¹ Gregory, *The Image and Other Plays*, p. 217.

⁷² Lady Gregory to Wilfrid Scawen Blunt (27 December 1914), Folder 43, Berg.

⁷³ 'Jacques', "'Shanwalla" at the Abbey – Play about a horse and a ghost', *Irish Independent* (9 April 1915), p. 4.

Theatre critic Robert Hogan *et al* comment that the ‘racing melodrama-cum-ghost story [...] is one of her poorest efforts’.⁷⁴ This, perhaps, explains why it only reached a meagre number of seven stage productions at the Abbey in 1915.⁷⁵ Although Joseph Holloway noted that its premiere was followed by ‘loud and continuous applause, with cries for author’, he nonetheless dismissively called the play a ‘melodrama run to waste in a choking tangle of unnecessary words’.⁷⁶ While the play was welcomed by the audience, the critics were unimpressed. ‘I give it up. It has left me limp’, wrote ‘Jacques’ in the *Irish Independent*.⁷⁷ When the Abbey took it on tour to England, the *Manchester Guardian* called it ‘something of a nondescript’; ‘a curious play’ that was ‘delightful by virtue of sheer unreason’.⁷⁸ The play was as unsuccessful on tour as it was in Dublin. Gregory received a letter from Arthur Sinclair who informed her that ‘it had been “even a greater fiasco in Manchester than in Dublin”’.⁷⁹ The play, with its allusions to wealth, power, class and hierarchy functions as a nostalgic and idealistic view of relations between the landed elite and the lower class. Despite the poisoning, Shanwalla survives and may yet see the victory at another race. The days of the Gregorys’ landed wealth and power, however, were clearly in decline. When re-entering negotiations about further sales in 1920, Gregory wished to retain the house, gardens and the ‘useless part (Shanwalla) between white gate and house’.⁸⁰ Shanwalla, then, constituted a natural border between landlord and tenant both on the threshold of switching places. Those outside the white gate were about to buy the land, either directly or through the CDB, and Gregory officially became a tenant in late 1921. One month

⁷⁴ Robert Hogan, Richard Burnham and Daniel P. Poteet (eds), *The Rise of the Realists 1910-1915*, (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1979), p. 363.

⁷⁵ http://www.abbeytheatre.ie/archives/play_detail/11151 Accessed 24.06.2013.

⁷⁶ Entry for 8 April 1915 in Joseph Holloway, *Joseph Holloway’s Abbey Theatre – A Selection from his unpublished Journal Impressions of a Dublin Playgoer*, edited by Robert Hogan and Michael J. Neill, with a preface by Harry T. Moore (Carbondale/Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1967), p. 169.

⁷⁷ Jacques, ““Shanwalla” at the Abbey – Play about a horse and a ghost”, *Irish Independent* (9 April 1915), p. 4.

⁷⁸ J.E.A., ‘Gaiety Theatre – “Shanwalla” and “Sovereign Love”’, *The Manchester Guardian* (21 April 1915), p. 4.

⁷⁹ Lady Gregory to William Butler Yeats (27 April 1915), Folder 449, Berg.

⁸⁰ Lady Gregory to Margaret Gregory, see Entry for 13 July 1920, *Journals I*, p. 182. See also Entry for 14 January 1921, *ibid.*, pp. 218-219.

before her death in 1932, Gregory noted among her final journal entries: ‘A mild day – and more colour in the beech leaves in Shanwalla’.⁸¹

‘A Judgment between the Man and the Clothes’: *The Dragon and The Jester* (1919)

Coole stood for aesthetic as well as moral values and as such it demanded a particular dress code. Gregory’s granddaughter, Anne Gregory, reminisces on a visit from Sean O’Casey which caused some conflict between the classes. O’Casey arrived ‘in a rather shabby grey overcoat’ that greatly displeased the maid, Marian, who raged: “‘What *right* at all has a man like that to come into Coole without a tie on his collar, nor a collar on his shirt’”. Anne Gregory portrays her grandmother as a warm and welcoming hostess as Gregory excused O’Casey’s appearance because he was ‘a very poor man’. Nonetheless, she notes that Gregory approached the visitor regarding appropriate dinner jackets and he appeared to dinner with a handkerchief around his neck. O’Casey, however, was unimpressed and spoke his mind:

Mr O’Casey seemed to get very worked up about slums and class and this seemed to us a very tactless thing to attack Grandma about – it wasn’t *her* fault, she was always trying to help poor people and never made any difference in the way she talked to anyone, and wouldn’t let us talk differently to anyone either – but Grandma listened to all he was saying, and then agreed with him, and said it was unfair, but that it was only someone like himself that had the gift of words who could show the other side what living in slums was really like.⁸²

Lady Gregory proposes that through dramatic expression an audience can be educated about the conditions of other social classes. She herself engaged in one particular method to explore, express and ‘show the other side’ of social divides in her own dramatic work by using the complexities of a dress code in a class context.

⁸¹ Entry for 24 April 1932, *Journals II*, p. 631.

⁸² Anne Gregory, *Me & Nu: Childhood at Coole*, illustrated by Joyce Dennys (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1970), pp. 84, 85.

The theme of disguise presented an opportune method through which to cross and test the boundaries of class. Essentially a comedic element characteristic of Renaissance drama, it was a key instrument for the lauded playwright of comedies and occurs repeatedly throughout Gregory's dramatic work.⁸³ Yet despite its light-heartedness, disguise allowed for a more serious undercurrent. By altering their appearance or being cloaked in verbal disguise through enchantments, characters change and, importantly here, exchange their social status. In putting the upper class into the shoes of the lower class and vice versa, such plots carry social implications, lending the narrative moral weight. All of the *Three Wonder Plays*, published in November 1922, incorporate some form of disguise. George Russell, in his review of the book, commented on the more serious intimation when he stated that it 'has a wisdom underneath [the fantasy] which gives it real value beyond the humour'.⁸⁴ A moral code, linked to a high class consciousness, is embedded in these narratives which are akin to fairy tales and explicitly addressed to children. As Robert Gregory had enlisted in the war effort on 14 September 1915, Gregory took over the role as principal caretaker of his children who enjoyed their childhood at Coole. Concerned for their welfare, she was also consciously preparing the next generation of the Gregory family with a special eye on the little boy, Richard.

Filled with apprehension for her son's life, Gregory lived in constant sorrow. 'I am not sure if he is right', she wrote to John Quinn regarding her son's decision, 'but I am sure it is right he should make up his own mind so I have not meddled. But I am heavy-hearted and anxious'.⁸⁵ Writing to Yeats in December 1916, she remarked: 'I am really suffering from the

⁸³ Disguise occurs, for instance, in *The Golden Apple*, *Aristotle's Bellows*, *On the Racecourse*, *Sancho's Master*, *Hyacinth Halvey*, *The Rising of the Moon*, *The Canavans*, *The Jackdaw*, and *The White Cockade*.

⁸⁴ A.E., 'Notes of the Week', *The Irish Homestead* (13 January 1923), quoted in Robert Hogan and Richard Burnham (eds), *The Years of O'Casey, 1921-1926 – A Documentary History* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1992), p. 176.

⁸⁵ Lady Gregory to John Quinn (4 September 1915), quoted in Pethica, 'Yeats's "perfect man"', p. 21.

long strain of anxiety about Robert, and his ever-increasing danger'.⁸⁶ Thus, the writing of both plays is closely tied to her private worries in addition to the unsettling development of militant nationalism. While *The Dragon* was written in the aftermath of the Easter Rising between October 1916 and August 1917, *The Jester*, drafted from December 1918 to January 1919, was the first play written after Robert's death in January 1918. In her notes to the former, she remarked that 'through some unseen inevitable kick' the plot moved out of 'the shadow of tragedy' 'towards gay-coloured comedy', a probable reference also to her nephew Hugh Lane's death in 1915 as well as the executions of the leaders of the Rising (CPIII 392). With the camouflaging of these more serious and distressing matters, she turned her focus toward her grandchildren and their more innocent lives. It is unsurprising, then, that *The Dragon* is dedicated 'To Anne and Catherine' and *The Jester* is 'For Richard'. With these inscriptions, Gregory addressed both an immediate and a larger audience.

The personal component, through the above dedications, elicits associations to the reality. Both plays are set in a locality with which her grandchildren were familiar. *The Dragon* is set in the Burren, where the Gregorys spent time during their summer holidays. *The Jester's* setting, the enchanted island of Hy-Brasil, strikingly resembles Coole Park and its environs. With this link to Coole Park, the plays are concerned with the future as much as with the present, and in the choice of her audience they gain an educative incentive. Both plays feature members of the highest and lowest strata of society and, thus, give insight into the class attitudes that Gregory is eager to pass on to her grandchildren.

The characters test the boundaries of class through disguise. In the earlier play, *The Dragon*, a tailor dresses up as a King while the real King dresses down as a cook. In *The Jester*, five Princes exchange clothes with five Wrenboys. In both cases, the motivations for the exchange of status differed, but by the end of the plot the characters have learned a moral

⁸⁶ Lady Gregory, *Hugh Lane's Life and Achievement, with some account of the Dublin Galleries*. (London: John Murray, 1921), pp. 271-272.

lesson. Both plays address questions of class stereotypes, deductive judgment from appearance to behaviour and the environmental impact on character development. In the earlier play, with its implied audience of two young girls, Gregory's focus is on the theme of marriage, with a particular emphasis on the suitability of the husband. The later play, dedicated to the future heir of Coole, is concerned more directly with aspects of education.

The Dragon, a three-act wonder play, is 'one of [Lady Gregory's] extravagant moments', the *Evening Herald* asserted.⁸⁷ Earlier drafts gave the alternative titles of 'The Awakening of a Soul' and 'A Change of Heart', both signalling the author's 'underlying hint of seriousness' as well as her moralizing endeavour.⁸⁸ The plot is set in motion by the prophecy that Princess Nuala – nicknamed like Catherine Gregory 'Nu' – will be sought and devoured by a wild dragon. This can only be prevented by an immediate marriage arrangement for the Princess, her stepmother, the Queen, concludes. Marriage is seen as a means to achieve protection; 'she will be safe from the danger ahead of her' (*CPIII* 219). The young Princess, however, is of an independent mind and declines the first suitable match that presents itself with the Prince of the Marshes proclaiming that 'It is my own business and I will take my own way' (*CPIII* 226). Having declined previous suitors, her stepmother is anxious for her to enter into a marriage that strengthens her royal rank:

QUEEN (<i>sharply</i>).	If you want the house to be under your hand only, it is best for you to settle into one of your own.
PRINCESS.	Give me the little rush cabin by the stream and I'll be content.
QUEEN.	If you mind yourself and profit by my instruction it is maybe not a cabin you will be moving to but a palace.
PRINCESS.	I'm tired of palaces. There are too many people in them.
QUEEN.	That is talking folly. When you settle yourself it must be in the station where you were born. (<i>CPIII</i> 215)

⁸⁷ J.H.C., 'Around the Theatres', *The Evening Herald* (22 April 1919), in Robert Hogan and Richard Burnham (eds), *The Art of the Amateur 1916-1920* (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1984), p. 200; Lady Augusta Gregory, *The Dragon*, in Lady Augusta Gregory, *The Collected Plays, III, The Wonder and Supernatural Plays*, edited by Ann Saddlemyer (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1979), pp. 210-259. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text, abbreviated *CPIII*.

⁸⁸ Ann Saddlemyer, *In Defence of Lady Gregory* (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1966), p. 55.

Blaming her husband for spoiling the girl, the Queen takes a firm hand in the Princess' education which she considers to be an indispensable precondition for the marriage she envisions for her stepdaughter: 'It is likely she will get no offers till such time as I will have taught her the manners and the right customs of courts' (*CP III* 215). She considers her to be selfish, 'It is a poor daughter that will not wish to be helpful to her father'. The Princess remains stubborn, remarking that 'If I am to wed for the furnishing of my father's table, it's as good for you to wrap me in a speckled fawnskin and roast me!' (*CP III* 216). By implication, to be suitable for a marriage among the elite of society, status alone is insufficient; it demands an appropriate education that befits someone of royal status. The Queen concludes: 'She is no way fit for marriage unless with a herd to the birds of the air, till she has a couple of years schooling. [...] To keep rules and hours she must learn, and to give in to order and good sense' (*CP III* 216). Thus she proposes to send her away to a 'Royal school' (*CP III* 219).

The characteristics of a suitable wife, it is suggested, are her acceptance to be of service to both her husband and her own family and responsibility for the repercussions of her actions. 'Young people are apt to be selfish and to have no thought but for themselves', the Queen complains, 'She must not be hard to please when it will be to save and to serve her family and to keep up respect for their name' (*CP III* 219). This idea is further expressed by one of the aunts of the Prince of the Marshes who states that 'For low people and for middling people it is well enough to follow their own opinion and their will. But for the Prince's wife to have any choice or any will of her own, the people would not believe her to be a *real* princess' (*CP III* 222). This explicitly demands an acknowledgment of class responsibility and service – an ideal Gregory subscribed to throughout her life.⁸⁹ Yet Princess

⁸⁹ See Pethica, 'A Dialogue of Self and Service'.

Nuala displays anything but subservience, taking pride in her royal status and her independent mind:

I will not give in to danger or to dragons! No one will see a dark face on me. I am a king's daughter of Ireland, I did not come out of a herd's hut like Deirdre that went sighing and lamenting till she was put to death, the world being sick and tired of her complaints, and her finger at her eye dripping tears! (CP III 228)

Although the Queen's comment implies that her stepdaughter 'must not be hard to please', her own hopes for the future son-in-law are far from modest. As soon as the King, desperate to save his daughter's life, promises the Princess' hand to the first man that comes to the palace, the Queen puts in place a selective criteria:

I gave orders to the Gatemán, I say, no one to be let in to the door unless carriage company, no other ones, even if they should wipe their feet upon the mat. I notched that in his mind, telling him the King was after promising the Princess Nu in marriage to the first man that would come into the house. (CP III 236)

The first man to come through the palace gates is a young man, Manus, who has 'the *appearance* of a cook' [my italics] (CP III 229).

Promptly employed to please the King's luxurious tastes, Manus learns about the King's promise and claims the Princess' hand. Yet he is quickly dismissed as unsuitable; 'You have the impudence!', counters the Queen, 'It is a *man* the King said. He was not talking about cooks' (CP III 236). Denying Manus any status at all, she denigrates his position as a cook and implies that cooks belong – almost – to a race apart. This categorization is further emphasised when the Princess' Nurse, informed about Manus's real identity as the King of Sorchá, states:

I would sooner you to come as a champion seeking battle, or a horseman that had gone astray, or so far as a poet making praises or curses according to his treatment on the road. It would be a bad day I would see your father's son taken for a kitchen boy. (CP III 232)

Princess Nuala's father is equally displeased at the prospect of the match: 'Is it that I must give my daughter to a lad that owns neither clod nor furrow? Whose estate is but a shovel for the ashes and a tongs for the red coals'. Accused by the Queen of pursuing the Princess only

for reasons of greed as ‘it is but riches he is looking for’, Manus’s lack of material wealth renders him inadequate (*CPIII* 237). Protective not only of his own property, the King is particularly worried about his reputation, a concern which the playwright shared. He wonders: ‘what sort of a fool will you make of me, to have given in to take the like of you for a son-in-law? They will be putting ridicule on me in the songs’ (*CPIII* 238). The King’s vow to give his daughter’s hand to the first man that reaches the palace is, hence, restricted and based on the premise that the person in question must firstly be approved and that such approval, in turn, is dependent on an equally high status whereby inter-class marriage is not advocated.

With the arrival of a gentleman, Taig, the hopes are raised.⁹⁰ ‘It is the big man that is coming – Prince or Lord or whoever he may be’, the Queen says. Although she is not sure of the gentleman’s exact title and rank, she deduces from his appearance that ‘This is some man worth while’ (*CPIII* 238). The new arrival proclaims to be the King of Sorcha, leaving Manus – the real King of Sorcha – in shock. Dressed in a cook’s clothing, he is now challenged to prove his true identity. He poignantly states: ‘It seems as if there will be a judgment between the man and the clothes’ (*CPIII* 238). This opens the question whether clothes or character, manners and behaviour determine one’s status. The blind Wise Man in the play, for instance, proposes that ‘an honourable man, king or beggar, is held to his word’ (*CPIII* 237). Consequently, the King would only be ‘an honourable man’ if he stuck to his promise and agreed to his daughter’s marriage to Manus.

Manus and Taig have different motivations for altering their outward appearance and, once their disguise is lifted, their respective reasons fulfil rather than negate class stereotypes. While Taig, the tailor, is driven by self-interest ‘to try to go better’ himself, Manus puts on

⁹⁰ Taig, here, is used as a nickname for an Irishman. The derogatory connotation that expresses contempt for a Roman Catholic was and is used almost exclusively in the context of Northern Ireland. See ‘Teague | Taig, n.’, Oxford English Dictionary Online, June 2013, Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.liv.ac.uk/view/Entry/198365?redirectedFrom=taig> Accessed 12 June 2013.

the clothes of the cook for the selfless reason to rescue Princess Nuala from the dragon. ‘I came as a poor unknown man’, he says in honourable fashion, ‘that may slip away after the fight [...] and no thanks given him and no more about him, but a memory of the shadow of a cook!’ (*CPIII* 258, 232). Taig’s reasoning, however, exemplifies greed:

It was the Gateman said it to a hawker bringing lobsters from the strand, and that got no leave to cross the threshold by reason of the oath given out by the King. The half of the kingdom she will get, they were telling me, and the king living, and the whole of it after he will be dead. (*CPIII* 239)

His avarice, notably, fulfils the Queen’s prejudiced and stereotypical view of the lower classes of which he is a representative. For instance, the Wise Man notes: ‘It is the way, with the common sort, the lower orders. He’d be wishful to sit on a chair at his ease and to leave his hand idle till he’d grow to be bulky and wishful for sleep’ (*CPIII* 244). This reference to Manus, the real King, is more applicable to the real representative of the lower order, Taig.

Taig, ‘dressed out in them the way you’d take him to be King’, pinpoints his clothes to be evidence enough of his royal status (*CPIII* 246). ‘Look at my ring and my crown’, he says, ‘They will bear witness that I am [the King of Sorcha]. And my kind coat of cotton and my golden shirt! And under that again there’s a stiff pocket’ (*CPIII* 240). However, appearance – as we observe – can be misleading as the Nurse remarks: ‘As grand as hands and pins can make him’ (*CPIII* 240). This latter statement suggests that high social status is not solely determined by external markers such as clothes and material wealth, but also by internal markers. The Queen considers Taig as a presentable husband for her stepdaughter, but the young Princess is not blinded by mere abundance:

QUEEN.	This is no black stranger going the road, but a man having a copper crown over his gateway and a silver crown over his palace door! I tell you he has means to hang a pearl of gold upon every rib of your hair! There is no one ahead of him in all Ireland, with his chain and his ring and his suit of the dearest silk!
PRINCESS.	If it was a suit I was wed with he might do well enough.
QUEEN.	Equal in blood to ourselves! Brought up to good behaviour and courage and mannerly ways.

PRINCESS.	In my opinion he is not.
QUEEN.	You are talking foolishness. A King of Sorchu must be mannerly, seeing it is he himself sets the tune for manners.
PRINCESS.	He gave out a laugh when old Michelin slipped on the threshold. He kicked at the dog under the table that came looking for bones.
QUEEN.	I tell you what might be ugly behaviour in a common man is suitable and right in a king. But you are so hard to please and so pettish, I am seven times tired of yourself and your ways. (<i>CPHII</i> 240)

Members of the higher social stratum, it is suggested, are the role models and forerunners when it comes to values, manners and good behaviour. In proposing that a King ‘must be mannerly, seeing it is he himself sets the tune for manners’, the upper classes are ascribed a responsibility in their leading role. On the other hand, that echelon, it is indicated, is exempt from criticism *because* of its elite status, and ‘ugly behaviour’ can be excused. The Princess’ observations, albeit admirable for her criticism of a King’s behaviour, become a snobbish remark by the end of the play when Taig is revealed to be the tailor and, thus, his behaviour meets the low expectations of the lower classes as expressed in the play.

As Taig’s mother, Sibby, comes to the palace to look for her son, she abuses him for his disgraceful folly: ‘What call have you to a suit that is worth more than the whole of the County Mayo?’ (*CPHII* 258). This indicates that class boundaries are conceived to be rigid and Taig is supposed to accept and remain within the social stratum into which he was born just as Princess Nuala is expected to ‘settle [...] in the station where [she was] born’. When, by the end of the play, the Prince of the Marshes hands over his coat and cloak to Taig, he says: ‘If you were a while ago a tailor among kings, from this out you will be a king among tailors’ (*CPHII* 258). Both the lower as well as the upper classes take inspiration from those highest in the social scale.

Indeed, status is not determined by clothes, but by courage, determination, and responsibility. Appearance as a marker for nobility is tested upon the arrival of the Dragon,

when Taig, the Prince of the Marshes and Manus take their turn to fight the creature. While Taig initially ventures out in ‘great bravery’, he quickly becomes fearful, ‘Shaking and shivering, he is like a hen in thunder’ (*CPH* 252). The Prince, although not shy to enter the fight, lacks the abilities and, realizing his inferiority, runs off in order to save his life. Manus is the final ‘champion going out’ and confronts the Dragon with his sword, mastering the beast (*CPH* 253). The level of bravery increases from one social rank to the next, and success belongs to the representative of the highest order with the victory of Manus, King of Sorcha. This celebration and acknowledgement of Manus’s willingness to enter a potentially fatal battle establishes a further autobiographical link as Robert Gregory had entered the Royal Flying Corps whose combat pilots had a life expectancy of about three weeks, thus choosing the most dangerous role within the army.⁹¹ A few months after Robert’s death, his mother commented in a letter to Blunt: ‘It is wonderful how Robert kept the respect and affection of the people all through, as his father did, but in a different way, for he could not do anything material for them, but they admired his riding and bravery’.⁹² Notably, news of the cook’s victory reaches the palace and the rumour is spread that he gave his life in the fight; this is to the Queen’s great relief: ‘Let you be comforted’, she tells her step-daughter, ‘knowing he cannot come back to lay claim to you in marriage, as it is likely he would, and he living’ (*CPH* 254). Manus’s willingness for sacrifice does not render him acceptable as a marriage partner, with his supposed lack in wealth and pedigree. Perhaps, Gregory bemoans her son’s risky choice that took him away from wife and children, and therefore unable to offer the protection demanded of a husband.

Manus’s actions, however, do change the perception others have of him. ‘[W]hat I was saying all through’, says the King, ‘there was something beyond the common in that boy!’ (*CPH* 254). Suddenly, a higher opinion is applied retrospectively, combined with a

⁹¹ Pethica, ‘Yeats’s “perfect man”’, p. 21.

⁹² Lady Gregory to Wilfrid Scawen Blunt (17 June 1918), Folder 46, Berg.

proclamation that his noble streak was apparent all along. Whereas it was hitherto claimed that ‘this lad going away would be no great loss’, he is now lauded as someone who ‘was surely noble and high-blooded’ (*CPIII* 237, 253). It is his actions, significantly, that provide him with a specific look; royal or high blood, it is intimated, can be easily spotted. The Nurse, for example, when asked to promise not to reveal Manus’s true identity, questions the possibility of hiding it: ‘they will know you by your high looks’. Manus, however, counters: ‘Did you yourself know a while ago?’ (*CPIII* 232). Thereby, the matter of distinguishing ‘between the noble and the mean blood of the world’ is more complex than appearances allow (*CPIII* 241). Similarly, Robert Gregory’s status as a landowner had been one of decline, but his ‘bravery’ resulted in appreciation and respect. His mother proudly informed John Quinn about the numerous letters she received in the wake of his death: ‘The letters from France and Italy tell of his fine work and “splendid courage”’.⁹³ Eventually, Manus’s victory over the dragon brings his character traits in line with his social status.

Hearing of his sacrificial death, Princess Nuala is in shock: ‘I cannot live! I am ashamed? [...] The man that died for me, whether he is of the noble or the simple of the world, it is to him I have given the love of my soul!’ (*CPIII* 254). This plot of a love-story across social boundaries is distorted by the Queen who twists the Princess’ words: ‘She thought it to be a champion and a high up man that had died for her sake. It is what broke her down in the latter end, hearing him to be no big man at all, but a clown!’ (*CPIII* 255). Princess Nuala dies of shock and grief for the deceased. However, the Nurse brings the news that Manus is not dead after all and she informs the royal couple about his identity as the real King of Sorcha, ‘having generations of kings behind him’ (*CPIII* 255). Apologetic for his ‘folly’ in disguising himself as a cook, he wishes to die with her. The Prince of the Marshes offers, in an act of kindness, the leaves from the Tree of Power whose healing powers

⁹³ Lady Gregory to John Quinn (22 February 1918), Berg.

reawaken the Princess. By the end of *The Dragon*, Princess Nuala ends up in the arms of ‘The young King of Sorcha’, someone who is of the same social status. He is not only a good match, but ‘the first match [of Ireland]’, reflecting Gregory’s wish that her granddaughters marry into one of the families of the upper classes of Ireland (*CPIII* 220). It is stated in the play that ‘Kings and princes are getting scarce. They are the most class is wearing away, and it is right for them keep in mind their safety’ (*CPIII* 221). Gregory incorporated her own anxiety regarding her son’s participation in the war effort, an appeal to her son to keep in mind the legacy for which he stands, and her hopes that his children would uphold the social traditions they were born into. This cross-class love plot is ultimately annulled and class barriers remain intact. Each representative remains within their social stratum, inspired, however, by the standards of the highest class as represented by Manus.

Written on the brink of Ireland’s descent into the Anglo-Irish War, its happy and harmonious ending (in which the Dragon desists from ever eating meat again) is a means of escapism. Although Yeats ‘did not say one good word’ about it, the play became popular with audiences following its premiere on 21 April 1919. ‘It is long since I have had such ungrudging praise’, Gregory noted in her diary.⁹⁴ The surrealism conveniently cloaked the play’s expression of elitism that has received no critical attention apart from the recognition that ‘this play is a masterpiece of ambiguity’.⁹⁵ Reviewed in *The Stage*, it was considered to be ‘by far the best of Lady Gregory’s longer plays’.⁹⁶ Joseph Holloway noted that ‘The children in the audience enjoyed the wonder play immensely. I saw one little fellow jumping up and down in his seat in the stalls with ecstatic delight during Act III’. He added that ‘It is an ideal children’s play’.⁹⁷ Although, according to the Abbey’s online log of productions, the play was staged only 24 times between 1919 and 1923, it was particularly popular in England

⁹⁴ Entry for 24 April 1919, *Journals I*, p. 67.

⁹⁵ Kohfeldt, *The Woman Behind the Irish Renaissance*, p. 249.

⁹⁶ W.J. Lawrence, *The Stage* (24 April 1919), in Hogan/Burnham (eds), *The Art of the Amateur*, p. 201.

⁹⁷ Entry for 21 April 1919, Holloway, *A Selection*, p. 204.

and the United States.⁹⁸ This is evidenced by repeated notes in her journals regarding receipts of royalty statements for the play. Receiving a cheque worth £43 in May 1921, *The Dragon* contributed £15 from a production in Cambridge. Gregory was filled ‘with hope of being able to keep Coole’ as royalties paid for the upkeep of the estate.⁹⁹ Again, in 1929, she recorded: ‘Cheque £62.13.6 today from U.S.A. chiefly *Dragon*.’¹⁰⁰ Her intention to reach an audience of children – and more specifically girls – was successful. She was approached, for instance, by a Miss White asking leave to produce the play at a school, ‘her girls having set their hearts on it – so that is rather comforting; I want to have plays ready for the young generation’.¹⁰¹

Likewise, *The Jester* is explicitly a play for children and designed for school productions. A final typescript of the play has the inscription ‘For Richard at school’.¹⁰² While Gregory had demonstrated her concern for her granddaughters regarding their marital status and hopes for an adequate match in line with their social status, it was Richard who would be the future heir to the estate and was, therefore, of more concern. One summer, the painter Augustus John was invited to Coole and commissioned by Gregory to paint a portrait of the boy. His sister, Anne, remembers:

I know I was very pleased some years later when Mamma told me that John had wanted to paint *me* at the time, but that Grandma had insisted on the son of the house being painted and she was paying. [...] The picture of Richard was hung in the drawing-room, on the left of the big fireplace.¹⁰³

In her notes to *The Jester*, she stated that she ‘was asked one Christmas by a little schoolboy to write a play that could be acted at school’.¹⁰⁴ The implied private and national audience of the next generation indicate a didactic approach. Unsurprisingly, then, education is the central theme of *The Jester*. Dated ‘January, 1919’, a year after Robert’s death, it was a present on

⁹⁸ <http://www.abbeytheatre.ie/archives/search/plays/the%20dragon/> Accessed 27.02.2013.

⁹⁹ Entry for 19 May 1921, *Journals I*, p. 220.

¹⁰⁰ Entry for 15 May 1929, *Journals II*, p. 440. See also: Entry for 22 May 1924: ‘French sent a U.S.A. cheque, £58 odd, chiefly *Dragon* and *Spreading* (which I had been afraid was going out of fashion).’, *Journals I*, p. 537; Entries for 8 December 1928 and 24 May 1930, *Journals II*, pp. 356, 526.

¹⁰¹ Entry for 21 October 1920, *Journals I*, p. 195.

¹⁰² *The Jester*, A play in three acts. Carbon of final typescript with the author’s ms. Corrections, n.d., Berg.

¹⁰³ Gregory, *Me & Nu*, p. 47.

¹⁰⁴ Gregory, *Three Wonder Plays*, p. 288.

Richard's tenth birthday and is devoted to the future heir of Coole Park as upholder of its legacy. 'The machinery of my life has not changed', Gregory wrote to John Quinn in February 1918, 'Last month I was planting for Robert, now I am planting for Richard'.¹⁰⁵

Yeats expressed his friend's sentiment in his poem 'Shepherd and Goatherd':

She goes about her house erect and calm
Between the pantry and the linen-chest,
Or else at meadow or at grazing overlooks
Her labouring men, as though her darling lived,
But for her grandson now; there is no change
But such as I have seen upon her face
Watching our shepherd sports at harvest-time
When her son's turn was over.¹⁰⁶

Written from December 1918 to late January 1919, the play stems from the post-1916 instability of the Irish nation, at the dawn of the Anglo-Irish War, and from a moment of personal crisis. Here, Gregory presents her ideal future vision for Coole – an ideal she was keen to pass on to Richard.

Set on the enchanted island of Hy Brasil – an island that '*appears every seven years*' – the description evokes the Gregory family seat with its references to '*pots of flowering trees or fruit trees*' and '*books*'.¹⁰⁷ Coole held an extraordinary library of over 4000 volumes and Gregory ardently pursued tree-planting.¹⁰⁸ With further references to a 'forest' and a 'lake', the setting corresponds with Richard's familiar surroundings of the seven woods and the lake with its wild swans where he and his sisters spent their holidays, looked after by their grandmother (CPIII 181). Five Princes had been sent to the island by their godmother, the old Queen, 'To be kept safe and secure' and to be educated (CPIII 174). In the context of the harsh realities of revolutionary Ireland at the time of writing, the choice of genre and the setting of a secluded place in a time '*Out of mind*' offered a convenient escape for the

¹⁰⁵ Lady Gregory to John Quinn (10 February 1918), Berg.

¹⁰⁶ Yeats, *Poems*, p. 192.

¹⁰⁷ Lady Augusta Gregory, *The Jester*, in Lady Augusta Gregory, *The Collected Plays, III, The Wonder and Supernatural Plays*, edited by Ann Saddlemyer (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1979), pp. 173-208; p. 173. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text, abbreviated CPIII.

¹⁰⁸ For Anne Gregory's description of Coole's library see Gregory, *Me & Nu*, p. 11.

playwright and her audience (*CPIII* 173). Portrayed as a ‘sheltered place’, Hy Brasil again resembles Coole which Lady Gregory saw as a ‘resting place in this stormy and uncertain and broken up world’ (*CPIII* 174).¹⁰⁹ This haven of peacefulness is thus described:

- SERVANT. No wonder the time to pass easy and quiet where you are, with comfort all around you, and nothing to mark its course, and every season feeling the same as another, within the glass walls and the crystal roof of this place. [...] Sure, the wind itself must slacken coming to this sheltered place.
- 3RD PRINCE. That is a great thing. I would not wish the rough wind to be blowing upon me. [...]
- 1ST PRINCE. That is the reason we were sent here by the Queen, our Godmother, in place of being sent to any school. To be kept safe and secure. (*CPIII* 174)

Their privileged life in comfort compares favourably to those of their cousins who, ‘rambling in their young youth’, we are told, ‘were swallowed up by the sea’ (*CPIII* 174). One of the Prince’s judgments that ‘they were [...] very foolish not to stay in peace and comfort in the house where they were safe’ reflects, perhaps, Lady Gregory’s emotional state in the aftermath of her son’s death and her critical, but previously muted, attitude regarding his decision comes to the fore more fully in this play (*CPIII* 175). The link to her recent personal loss is further strengthened as the Guardian in the play refers to other young princes he had known who were ‘travelling far to a distant war, with battles and banners filling their mind’ (*CPIII* 175). The loss re-channeled all her energies to protect the legacy for her grandson and the play’s emphasis on education betrays Gregory’s wishful thinking regarding Coole’s future. Tainted by nostalgia, *The Jester* demonstrates her liberalism alongside an enduring elitism.

The Princes’ educational progress is due to be examined by the Dowager Messengers upon their imminent arrival. ‘They have come to be good scholars’, the Guardian attests, ‘in poetry, in music, in languages, in history, in numbers’ (*CPIII* 189). In a mock examination, their knowledge in Latin, history, and grammar is tested, emphasizing their classical

¹⁰⁹ Entries for 8 April 1920 and 13 April 1920, *Journals I*, pp. 137, 138.

education. Regarding history, the Guardian says, ‘you were learning of late some genealogies of kings’ and two of them recite what they’ve learned about William the Conqueror, William II and Walter Tyrrell (*CPH* 176). Their evaluation is interrupted by the arrival of the Jester who continues with the questioning (*CPH* 177). His quiz, however, tests logical thinking rather than verses learned by heart; all five Princes fail to provide the answers and he concludes: ‘There’s more learning than is taught in books’ (*CPH* 178). He launches into a song ‘I’ll engage you never heard’, and his verse tells of Cuchulain and Finn, complementing their knowledge of English history with the legends of Irish folklore (*CPH* 178).¹¹⁰ He is interrupted by the Guardian declaring dismissively that ‘I have no fancy for that class of song’ (*CPH* 178). The Guardian, in charge of the Princes’ schooling, displays a preference for not only an elitist education, but also an education with an English outlook, stressing their need for ‘learning’, ‘manners’ and ‘behaviour’ (*CPH* 189).¹¹¹ A stately career is the clear purpose of their tutoring: ‘They’re learning the laws to speak and to pause – may be orators then, or Parliament men’ (*CPH* 190).

Here, the contemporary and autobiographical connection becomes apparent in Gregory’s predilection for Richard’s future. A political career corresponded with the patriarchal Gregory tradition of supplying Britain and Ireland with its ruling elite in the form of Under-Secretaries, MPs, sheriffs and colonial administrators. Regarding her own son Robert’s career, she had high expectations to which end she repeatedly pulled strings among the social circles in London in the 1890s. Among those who received a copy of Sir William’s *Autobiography* as edited by Gregory in 1893 were members of parliament such as George

¹¹⁰ Gregory supported her granddaughters’ engagement with Irish culture and history. For instance, she welcomed Catherine Gregory’s wish to learn Irish and gave the girls lessons. Equally, she ‘took the children to the Convent to learn stepdancing’. After a fortnight of training, she delightedly noted that ‘they do the reel perfectly and the nine steps of the jig and will carry that accomplishment at least back to England’. She also read her *Cuchulain of Muirthemne* to her grandchildren. See Entries for 22 and 23 January 1923, 7 February 1923, 12 December 1923, *Journals I*, pp. 429, 430, 433, 497.

¹¹¹ Fergus Campbell notes that English public schools were chosen by the Irish landed class as an appropriate form of schooling with their emphasis on ‘independence, stoicism, courage, honour, loyalty and manliness’. Campbell, *The Irish Establishment 1879-1914*, p. 25.

Russell, Henry Labouchere, Lord Dufferin, Lord Rosebery and Dr. James Edward Welldon, headmaster of Harrow School, where Robert continued the Gregory family's educational tradition.¹¹² The selection is not mere coincidence and Gregory presumably was thinking about a future career for Robert in parliament or the civil service. Following the customary, early years at Harrow, he had started at New College, Oxford, in the autumn of 1899. Concerning his educational development at university, Lady Gregory discussed his career options in either the House of Commons or the Foreign Office with William Peel and her protégé Paul Harvey.¹¹³ Ambition and education were vital components for Gregory as becomes clear in her response to a telegram she received from Robert informing her that he was rusticated from Oxford as a result of his failing the divinity exam. She 'was aghast' at this 'quite unexpected shock' and travelled immediately to London to prevent Robert from returning to Coole: 'Could not have him back, for he would be idle, & there wd be so much talk, people wd think it was for bad conduct he had been sent back'.¹¹⁴

Robert was well aware of his mother's preferences; she noted in her diary: '[h]e would have tried for H[ouse] of C[ommons]. clerkship to please me, but his heart was on Art – I told him he shd choose as he liked'.¹¹⁵ Considering her involvement in the Irish Literary Revival and the success of *Cathleen ni Houlihan* (1902), Gregory was perhaps more willing to support her son's entrance into the cultural sphere: 'I had a nomination for a House of Commons clerkship, if Robert cared to try for it, but his heart is in art – & I must say I am very glad he should have chosen for himself, he is sure to work better at what he cares for'.¹¹⁶ Although, by the end of 1903, she expressed in a tone of relief that '[i]t is such a blessing not having to attend to politics, now I am sure Robert wont [*sic*] take to Parliament', *The Jester* attests to the fact that her hopes for a continuance of the Gregory tradition in political offices

¹¹² Entry for 18 October 1894, *Diaries*, pp. 39-40.

¹¹³ Entry for 25 February 1899, *Diaries*, p. 208.

¹¹⁴ Entry for 13 October 1900, *Diaries*, p. 282.

¹¹⁵ Entry for 26 April 1903, *Diaries*, p. 314.

¹¹⁶ Lady Gregory to Wilfrid Scawen Blunt (17 April 1903), Folder 30, Berg.

was revitalised with Richard.¹¹⁷ In January 1920, however, she received a note from her daughter-in-law stating that ““Richard tells me he made up his mind definitely a few days ago to become an engineer!””. ‘I am glad the darling child wishes to be a worker’, Gregory noted without further comment.¹¹⁸

The literal and metaphorical insular education of the Princes, exemplary of the playwright’s adherence to tradition and elitism, is challenged by the Jester whose position as outsider and whose magical abilities allow for a different kind of tutelage. Inspired by the story of ‘The Discontented Children’ she had read in childhood, the idea that ‘the gamekeeper’s children changed places for a while with the children of the Squire’ is transformed into the idea of five Princes changing places with five Wrenboys.¹¹⁹ Masked and ‘*dressed in ragged tunics*’, the Wrenboys delight the five Princes with their singing and entertainment. Once the Princes leave temporarily to fetch some ‘money to bury the wren’, the Jester teasingly asks: ‘Wouldn’t you be well pleased if ye could change places with them?’. This sets in motion the plot of the play as subsequently both parties change places, motivated by the prospect of the experience of what they perceive to be a superior way of life (*CPIII* 179). The Wrenboys look forward to constant access to food, soft pillows, idleness, sporting and ‘to lead a prince’s life’ (*CPIII* 180, 204). The Princes, on the other hand, are eager ‘to go through the world at large’, to roam freely with no classes to think about or showing off (*CPIII* 182). As they group in a circle around the Jester, they agree to change ‘Some to have a wider range, / Some to have an easy life, / Some to rove into the wild’ (*CPIII* 183). Thus, dressed as Wrenboys, the Princes leave their haven of comfort and security and exit at the end of act one.

¹¹⁷ Lady Gregory to Wilfrid Scawen Blunt (29 December 1903), Folder 31, Berg.

¹¹⁸ Entry for 22 January 1920, *Journals I*, p. 120. She noted in the summer of 1929 with pride: ‘*The Times* gives result of military exams: “R.G. Gregory among the Gentlemen Cadets to be 2nd Lieutenants, Royal Engineers”.’ Entry for 31 August 1929, *Journals II*, p. 456.

¹¹⁹ Gregory, *Three Wonder Plays*, p. 288. See also *The Jester*, holograph outline, 20 December 1918, 5p., Berg.

During the course of the second act, we observe that the Wrenboys' lives as experienced by the Princes is not one of excitement and freedom, as expected, but one of hardship and subservience to the Ogre who uses them to further his own greedy interest to steal the sword of Justice from the island of Hy-Brasil. As they arrive exhausted at '*A poor hut or tent*', the Wrenboys place of abode, they complain about their ailments, ranging from back pain to 'scratched and torn' feet, 'bruises on [...] knees', 'blisters' and twisted arms, after a day's walk through forests and over rocks (*CPIII* 184). Hungering for a roast dinner, they are waiting to be served upon, but are quickly mocked by the Ogre. Unable to pluck a pigeon or light the fire, they remain ravenous as well as dirty as they have no towel or soap available. Equally, the Wrenboys are disappointed in their experience of a prince's life within the confinements of the palace. Rather than continuing to play 'hop-sotch', they are to be examined in front of the Dowager Messengers (*CPIII* 190). Failing to recite their lessons of history, grammar and Latin, they are asked what they '*do* know':

2 nd WRENBOY (<i>standing up, excited</i>).	I know the way to make bird-lime, steeping willow rods in the stream.
3 rd WRENBOY.	... I know how to use my fists; I knocked a tinker bigger than myself.
4 th WRENBOY.	I am the best at wrestling. I knocked <i>himself</i> .
(Pointing at 3 rd .) 5 th WRENBOY.	I that can skin a fawn after catching him running!
2 nd DOWAGER MESSENGER.	Where now did you get that learning?
5 th WRENBOY.	Here and there, rambling the woods, sleeping out at night. (<i>CPIII</i> 193)

Their practical knowledge of survival and a degree of self-sufficiency alludes, uncomfortably, toward a tendency to violent behaviour which, within the context of the play, connotes bad manners. Indeed, one Wrenboy admits to having been called to the courthouse when 'one time I was charged before a magistrate for snaring rabbits' (*CPIII* 201). By

implication, the rabbits belonged to someone else and he was tried for theft. This inability to distinguish between right and wrong together with a disregard for the property of others, it is suggested, derives from their upbringing. The Princes, on the other hand, have a contrasting set of morals. When the Ogre is about to purloin the sword of Justice from ‘*The Hall of Justice*’, one Prince chastises him for ‘that would be stealing’ and ‘that is wrong’ as ‘It is against the law’ (CPIII 188). He is backed by his brother who proposes to ‘Ask [the Judge] for it and maybe he will give it to you’ (CPIII 188). For the Ogre, however, there is ‘no pleasure it being given to me’ (CPIII 188). The moral implication – to treat the property of others with respect and ask for something rather than just taking it – was a lesson Gregory was eager to pass on, given the opportunity. Walking through the woodland and fields of Coole in late 1926, she met two young boys ‘bending over a rabbit hole’ with a ferret to catch the animal. She noted: ‘I couldn’t resist giving the little one some of the apples just brought in, I invited him, after reproofs, to come to the house, and both came, and agreed it was better to get apples for nothing than take rabbits that didn’t belong to them’.¹²⁰ Although the incident occurred after the play had been written, it is nonetheless illustrative of her moral values.

The Servant’s side-comment, ‘Can’t ye behave nice and not ugly?’ regarding the Wrenboys’ manners, raises the concept of appearance determining one’s social status and behaviour (CPIII 194). Despite their rich clothing and regal life-style, their conduct does not mirror their surroundings and outward appearance. The comment equally implies a judgment betraying notions of appropriate behaviour predetermined by social status. Thus, depending on how the characters are dressed, they are met with diverging expectations as to how they should behave and act as already explored in *The Dragon*. The characters are aware of the impact their dress has on others, how they are perceived and how they perceive themselves.

¹²⁰ Entry for 8 November 1926, *Journals II*, p. 146.

This is exemplified most potently when the Guardian takes on his role of Judge, putting on his wig and gown – the attire that allows him to take on that role, but also a clearly identifiable costume. ‘It often seems a curious thing that I, / Who in my ordinary clothes would hardly hurt a fly’, he says, ‘Hold to the rigour of the law when I put on gown and wig’ (CP III 203). Similarly, being in the presence of members of a higher or lower social class raises self-consciousness. One Wrenboy, for instance, remarks: ‘I never felt uneasy at the dirt that gritted into me till I saw them so nice’ (CP III 180).

The third act, set in ‘*The Hall of Justice*’, brings the theme of disguise to its climax. The Princes, supposed to assist the Ogre stealing the golden sword, attempt to shut him out and ring for help. As the Guardian arrives, we witness yet another disguise as the Ogre ‘*rapidly slips off his mask, and appears as a harmless old man*’, branding the five boys as the burglars and thieves to shift the blame away from himself (CP III 198). Dressed in the Wrenboys’ poor clothing, the Guardian is quick to pass judgment on the Princes: ‘I felt a suspicion yesterday the first time I saw your faces there was villainy hidden beneath the dust that was on your cheeks’ (CP III 199). In this instance, social judgment is passed based on one’s dress and outward appearance, leading to a generalization and enhancing, even, the perception of the outward appearance: ‘you are seventeen times more wicked looking now’. Ironically, the Guardian unknowingly berates the disguised Princes as ‘the very scum of the roads!’ (CP III 199). Despite the Wrenboys’ inadequate performance at their exam and having ‘gone a bit wild and foolish’, they compare favourably and ‘are King George compared with these!’ (CP III 199). Regardless of the disguise, class differences are ingrained. As the trial is about to begin against the burglars, the Wrenboys – dressed as Princes – ‘*make for the dock*’, while the Princes – dressed as Wrenboys – go to ‘*the jury-box*’; the former ‘is the place for honourable men’, the latter ‘for the wicked and the poor’ (CP III 201). The Guardian, enacting his role as Judge, sentences the Princes to a severe punishment – they are to have

their hands chopped off. Thus enters the Jester, '*disguised as Executioner*', ready to do the job that his disguise demands him to be seen through (*CPIII* 203).

Both groups of boys blame themselves for the disastrous outcome, admit to the exchange of roles and have to convince the others of their true identities; once again we are faced with 'a judgment between the man and the clothes'. The unraveling of disguises leads to questions of heredity. The Wrenboys take pity on the Princes who suffered under the cruel dominance of the Ogre. 'It was seventeen times worse for them to be under him than for ourselves that was used to him', says one of them. However, 'It was bad enough for ourselves', counters another Wrenboy, 'We were not built for roguery' (*CPIII* 200). The latter statement suggests that belonging to a social class is biologically predetermined, irrespective of environmental circumstances. Indeed, this idea is brought to a climax as the Princes are determined to verify their identity: 'Look at the royal mark upon our arm, that we brought with us into the world' (*CPIII* 204). Thus, the Princes' royal status is inherent like a birthmark, a theme that, we will discover, Gregory explored further in her later play *Dave*. It is suggested that one's rank is always – even if subtly – detectable from looks. 'I am satisfied without looking at the royal sign', says one of the Dowager Messengers, 'I have been looking at their finger nails. Those other nails (*pointing to WRENBOYS*) have never been touched with a soapy brush', dismissing the dirtiness of the Wrenboys they themselves are aware of (*CPIII* 204-205). We learn, as in *The Dragon*, that looks can be deceptive:

2 nd WRENBOY.	We were not without bringing a mark into the world with us, if it is not royal itself. [...]
2 ND DOWAGER MESSENGER.	It is the same mark as is on the princes, the sign and token of a King!
1 st DOWAGER MESSENGER.	It is certain these must be their five little royal cousins, that were stolen away from the coast. [...]
2 nd DOWAGER MESSENGER.	It is no wonder they took to one another. It was easy to know by the way they behaved they had in them royal blood. (<i>CPIII</i> 205)

Identified as relatives, the Wrenboys are of the same social class as the Princes. The blame is put on the Ogre for ‘keeping them in ignorance and dirt, they that are sons of a king’ (*CPIII* 206). The Jester’s comment disguises Gregory’s own elitism. The Wrenboys deserve a life of comfort and education because they ‘are sons of a king’, not because it is everyone’s natural right. However, she also dismisses overhasty judgments.

By the end of the play, both the Wrenboys’ and the Princes’ learning and knowledge are seen as complementary (*CPIII* 207). A good education, Gregory proposes, is based on a healthy combination of intellectual development as well as the experience of the outdoors and creative imagination. Coole Park, with its woods and lake, provided the ideal place to explore the natural environment. Her grandchildren – Richard, Anne and Catherine – spent their childhood at their grandmother’s where they were educated by a governess. Gregory introduced them to literature, reading them the stories of James Fenimore Cooper and Mark Twain, for instance. The girls, or ‘the chicks’ as she endearingly referred to them, were taught, after ‘a series of useless governesses’, by their grandmother to read and write. They also learned mathematics and French.¹²¹

Their lessons were complemented by ample time to roam in Coole’s environs. For instance, their grandmother noted in her journal: ‘Anne and Catherine happy skipping in the afternoon, and picking up apples and washing them in the tank, and indoors we read Pilgrim’s Progress and stories from *Sunday* and looked at the Bible pictures in the big book’.¹²² On another occasion, ‘The chicks were out “building a house in the wood” and I went out and met them there, very merry’.¹²³ Gregory’s daughter-in-law was more critical of their leisurely activities. Anne Gregory recalls one instance where the three played with whatever they caught fishing:

¹²¹ Gregory, *Me & Nu*, p. 15.

¹²² Entry for 9 October 1921, *Journals I*, p. 302.

¹²³ Entry for 30 December 1922, *Journals I*, p. 424.

We thought the grown-ups were being pretty stupid when they found us playing with the cot, and heard where we'd found it. 'Little pagans' I heard Mamma say to Augustus John, who was staying at Coole and who had come down with her for the day, 'I really can't let them grow up here like little savages. They will have to go to school and get civilised and get some human feelings.'¹²⁴

Indeed, the play, perhaps, was inspired by a real incident that Anne Gregory recalls in her memoir of their childhood at Coole. One Christmas, she writes, she and her sister dressed up as Wrenboys and recruited Mike John, who worked on the estate, to join them. The two girls roamed the house for a suitable costume for the man. 'At the bottom of the chest we found a wonderful red petticoat, which was perfect for Mike John, and a very long red and white woollen scarf that he could wear inside the neck of his old mackintosh'.¹²⁵ In order to perfect the disguise, they chose Gregory's hat which, with its 'small veil', would adequately hide Mike John's identity. Anne Gregory remembers: 'We looked at each other a shade apprehensively. Would Grandma be very cross? "Well," said Nu stoutly, "I don't think she'll recognise it anyway. It will look *quite* different on Mike John"'.¹²⁶

The two did not just pick any hat, but their grandmother's Sunday-hat, 'with little satin rosettes round the band, and a very good veil'.¹²⁶ As they were dressing up Mike John, their conversation reveals the class attitudes of the time as well as a self-consciousness among the lower class:

'Here you are Mike John,' we said, 'Grandma will never know you in this,' and we gave it to him.

Mike John took the hat and held it in his hand; he looked very shocked.

'That's one of her Ladyship's hats,' he gasped, 'twouldn't be right for me to put on one of *them*.'

Nu and I assured him that Grandma wouldn't mind – that she wouldn't recognise it; but he remained absolutely firm.

'No, Miss Anne,' he said, 'indeed no, Miss Catherine, it wouldn't be right.' [...]

'But Grandma doesn't *ever* wear this hat,' we lied firmly, 'she put it in the old clothes basket at the end of the long passage where she puts all her old clothes for dressing scarecrows. It's going to be thrown away anyway. You *must* wear it, Mike John.'¹²⁷

¹²⁴ Gregory, *Me & Nu*, p. 45.

¹²⁵ Gregory, *Me & Nu*, p. 77.

¹²⁶ Gregory, *Me & Nu*, p. 78.

¹²⁷ Gregory, *Me & Nu*, pp. 79-80.

Accompanied by Mike John playing the mouth organ, they performed as Wrenboys and were about to receive their generous reward in the form of two half-crowns (indicative that their grandmother was aware of the disguise), when Gregory noticed the hat. Responding with ‘a great gasp’, she asked the man “‘Where did you get that hat?’”¹²⁸ Intimidated, Mike John handed it back. Her granddaughter’s following description is remarkable for its implications of class snobbery on Gregory’s part as she ‘took it with two fingers, and turned and carried it at arm’s length into the house’. Not only did she appear to have treated the item of clothing as if contaminated, but the children observed that it ‘was on the floor in the middle of the hall. She must have dropped it there and left it. This was awful. She must be really terribly angry to drop something on the floor and leave it there’. In the end, Anne and Catherine ‘never saw the hat again’, but could not believe their eyes when they eventually saw it ‘on the scarecrow!’; once worn by a member of the lower classes, it was unsuitable for someone of Gregory’s status.¹²⁹ Dressing across classes, by implication, was imaginable on stage where there was no class difference between the actors, but unimaginable in real life.

Gregory, in allowing her grandchildren a certain degree of freedom, continued the approach she had taken with her own son whom she had encouraged to be aware of the different strata of society. She lauded her own liberal attitude in stating that Robert ‘has at all events heard both sides of all Irish questions’.¹³⁰ The disguise enabled the Princes and Wrenboys to experience life on the other side of the social divide and to cross the confinements of class, leading to a reconsideration of their preconceived and stereotypical notions of what it entails to be at the top and bottom of the social scale. In the end, rather than pursue their separate ways, they wish to learn from one another and combine their knowledge, exemplifying the basis for friendship, respect and appreciation for one another’s

¹²⁸ Gregory, *Me & Nu*, p. 81.

¹²⁹ Gregory, *Me & Nu*, p. 82.

¹³⁰ Entry for 1 January 1900, *Diaries*, p. 295.

lives. ‘It’s likely you’ll do great actions’, the Jester says at the end, ‘for there is an ancient word, / That comradeship is better than the parting of the sword, / And that if ever two natures should join and grow into one, / They will do more together than the world has ever done’ (*CPIII* 207).¹³¹

Only two years later, in 1921, Gregory stated in her journal that she wished to become close to the country people: ‘I would, as in the early days, wish to serve them, wish to have them for my friends’.¹³² This expressive ‘wish’ is, to some degree, an imaginative engagement. However, the *Irish Independent* had reported in 1907 that ‘Lady Gregory knows the Connaught peasant intimately; his heart is to her as an open book, and she brings a loving sympathy to bear on the portrayal of his joys and sorrows’.¹³³ Thus, her sympathy for and empathy with the lower classes, as far as the nationalist press was concerned, was successful. For Andrew Malone, it was the class difference that got in the way: ‘She is an observer, a notetaker among the people rather than a sharer of their lives, and unconsciously her attitude towards the people is somewhat snobbish’. He concluded: ‘They are *the people*, she is *the gentry*, and no conscious effort to reach down can be quite successful’.¹³⁴ Whereas the wish for a friendship between the landed class and country people is an ideal with romantic overtones, Gregory genuinely cared for the country people, as evidenced by her support for the local Catholic community. The relationship between the classes was reciprocal. Service was the touchstone of her aim to give back dignity to Ireland and it was the question of service that challenged her various loyalties that became the quintessential theme in her plays. In *Our Irish Theatre*, Gregory had written of Synge:

¹³¹ Note the similarity to the second stanza of Yeats’s poem ‘Among School Children’ (written in 1926): ‘I dream of a Ledaean body, bent / Above a sinking fire, a tale that she / Told of a harsh reproof, or trivial event / That changed some childish day to tragedy — / Told, and it seemed that our two natures blent / Into a sphere from youthful sympathy, / Or else, to alter Plato’s parable, / Into the yolk and white of the one shell’. *The Poems*, ed. Daniel Albright (London: Everyman, 1994), pp. 261-262.

¹³² Entry for 15 June 1921, D.J. Murphy (ed.), *Lady Gregory’s Journals: Volume One, Books 1-29, 10 October 1916- 24 February 1925* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1978), p. 270. Hereafter cited as *Journals I*.

¹³³ ‘Lady Gregory’s Latest Play’, *The Irish Independent* (11 March 1907), p. 7.

¹³⁴ Andrew Malone, *The Irish Drama* (London: Constable &Co., 1929), p. 258.

He tells what he owes to that collaboration with the people, and for all the attacks, he has given back to them what they will one day thank him for. ... The return to the people, the re-union after separation, the taking and giving, is it not the perfect circle, the way of nature, the eternal wedding-ring?¹³⁵

A revival of her plays on the Abbey stage would complete that circle of ‘the eternal wedding-ring’.

Her folklore-collecting among the poor in Co. Galway and Co. Clare has been both praised and criticised. Phrases such as ‘Robert has also been using the workhouse, he goes in & draws old men & women, they are delighted to sit as models – they have nothing to do but sit still’ introduces an element of exploitation, opening the analogy between the oppressor and oppressed, or master and servant.¹³⁶ Yet the element of giving back cannot be overestimated. For instance, Gregory gave her employee Mike John £40 towards his purchase of land.¹³⁷ On another occasion, she visited a local countryman at the hospital where he was treated for cancer and gave him ‘£6.6 to pay three more weeks, [as] he has only enough money for four’.¹³⁸ It is a reciprocal relationship that is based on interest, respect, and service. In 1921, working on her autobiography, she noted that ‘it is my work that owes so much to the people’.¹³⁹ The inspiration came from the people and, through her service, she gave back:

I know I have left a sheaf that contains its quote of golden grain; I have been but the reaper, the ripened ears came from the poor, the people; the sun that ripened the harvest comes from beyond the world, I can claim diligence, and love – for the work – for the people – for the Abbey – for Ireland – that ‘constraineth me’ to do such service as I may.¹⁴⁰

Yet Gregory’s mode of giving is mainly in a material sense, rather than in an emotional exchange and understanding. Arguably, the profitable exchange of the different forms of education in *The Jester* as well as the material benefits of marriage contemplated in *The Dragon* reflect the limitations of Gregory’s wish to befriend the people. Mary Colum astutely

¹³⁵ Gregory, *Our Irish Theatre*, p. 77.

¹³⁶ Lady Gregory to Wilfrid Scawen Blunt (23 August 1903), Folder 31, Berg.

¹³⁷ Entry for 18 November 1920, *Journals I*, p. 202.

¹³⁸ Entry for 21 April 1924, *Journals I*, p. 525.

¹³⁹ Entry for 19 October 1921, *Journals I*, pp. 305-306.

¹⁴⁰ Entry for 29 July 1928, *Journals II*, p. 301.

wrote: 'it has to be said that a certain amount of the antagonism to Lady Gregory was of the kind that people of wealth and position are likely to encounter among the economically unprivileged'.¹⁴¹

Both plays, in the end, re-establish class boundaries once the disguises are lifted. Just as Manus the cook turned out to be a real King, so the Wrenboys are of equal status to the Princes. 'There is no doubt about it', Gregory wrote to Yeats, 'there is no getting over class distinctions in the way of friendships'.¹⁴² Indeed, in both plays there is no need to. Although both *The Dragon* and *The Jester* are categorized as wonder plays and express Gregory's utopian vision for Coole's future, their didacticism and emphasis on the domestic questions of marriage and education add a pragmatic component. Whereas clothes and playful disguise are used as an aesthetic device to address class politics, they are – in the end – only a disguise of Gregory's own conservatism and elitism.

This conservatism becomes most apparent when considering Gregory's response to the domestic question of her grandson's education which helps to contextualize *The Jester*. The inspiration for the Jester was one of Gregory's friends. 'I see that at the first appearance of Manannan I had put in brackets the initials "G.B.S."', she commented in her notes to the play (*CPIII* 379). As 'a Disturber', the figure of the Jester is one of 'upsetting the order of the world' (*CPIII* 206). In basing the figure on her friend and fellow playwright George Bernard Shaw, Gregory, ironically, prophesied a discussion regarding her grandson's future education that would follow shortly after she had finished writing *The Jester*. She had read the play in early February to Yeats and a month later, on the way to the Shaws' home at Ayot St Lawrence, she noted in her diary: 'G.B.S. first attacked me about public schools [...]; and denounced Harrow and wondered we could send Richard there, they learn nothing but to hate Classics and all knowledge, and their mind closes up'. Defensively, she gave her husband and

¹⁴¹ Mary Colum, *Life and the Dream* (Dublin: The Dolmen Press, 1966), p. 110.

¹⁴² Lady Gregory to William Butler Yeats ([Tuesday] [1908?]), Folder 155, Berg.

son as examples where such a closing of the mind had not been the case, remarking that this 'left him rather weakened'. To add to the irony, Shaw travelled first-class whilst Lady Gregory was in third.¹⁴³ Over the following month, Shaw enquired about a school for Richard and inspected one in particular. While Harrow, the traditional choice for the Gregorys, was praised as 'a school upon whose roll are inscribed the names of some of the greatest men of England', Shaw saw it as an 'obsolete and thrice accursed boy farm'.¹⁴⁴ His alternative, Oundle, allowed for its pupils to develop their practical skills as much as their intellectual fervour, a combination Gregory herself had advocated in the play, and he called on her to 'tell him that the boys repair all the cars in the countryside, and test the farm seeds, and pick up Latin and Greek for fun in their spare time'.

He repeated his attack on Gregory's elitism and insistence on tradition the following month, writing to her:

You see, it was all very well to send Robert to Harrow: where else was there to send him? Besides, he was able to regain contact with the modern world through literature and art. But everybody has not the faculty for that; and it is not the best way anyhow. Now there is an alternative in Oundle, and the schools that are being headmastered by the men who have been trained at Oundle. Richard has a turn, not for Latin verse and football, but for mechanics. Richard's mother has not the Harrovian psychology; and Richard has a touch of his mother which you // must not try to correct or Gregorize. By the time Richard is twenty Harrow will be unthinkable except for absolutely idiotic country gentlemen.

Anticipating Richard's decision to become an engineer, as expressed four years later, Shaw is critical of Gregory's adherence to an outdated tradition which was, according to him, dangerously close to overbreeding. 'Harrow at its most harrowing cannot make another Sir William out of the son of a Welshwoman', he went on and concluded that 'Now Harrow is in

¹⁴³ Entry for 2 March 1919, *Journals I*, pp. 44-45.

¹⁴⁴ 'Our Portrait Gallery. Second Series. No. 31. His Excellency Sir William H. Gregory, K.C.M.G., Governor of Ceylon', *Dublin University Magazine* (August 1876), pp. 146-154; p. 146; G.B. Shaw to Lady Gregory (28 April 1919), in Laurence/Grene (eds), *Shaw, Lady Gregory and the Abbey*, p. 144. Note that, between 1879 and 1914, Harrow was the second most popular of the Clarendon schools (21 percent) to educate Ireland's future landowners. Furthermore, 68 percent attended either Oxford or Cambridge whereby Robert's career path fell in line with a well established tradition among the sons of Irish landowners. See Campbell, *The Irish Establishment*, pp. 25, 26.

the old tradition: Oundle is in the new'.¹⁴⁵ Shaw's suggestion bore fruit and Richard's mother, Margaret, informed her mother-in-law in January 1920: "I am entering him at Oundle no harm done by it".¹⁴⁶ However, Gregory noted proudly in her journal that upon his fourteenth birthday he was 'to begin with his entrance at Harrow'.¹⁴⁷ By December 1925, Richard was entered for Trinity College, Cambridge, the alma mater of both his great-grandfather and great-uncle.¹⁴⁸

With the immediate and private audiences of her granddaughters and grandson, Gregory meditates on Coole's future in both plays. In *The Dragon*, the politics of marriage are at the forefront of the plot and, in the end, Princess Nuala is matched with a social equal. In *The Jester*, both groups of boys profit from a liberal education and practical learning without actually crossing class boundaries. Gregory's private hopes for her grandson to follow into the footsteps of his ancestors, in particular, betray her adherence to an elitist education that honours the family's tradition and legacy. The pairing of the two plays further illustrates Gregory's acceptance of the norms of a patriarchal society in that the play dedicated to her granddaughters centres on the theme of marriage, whereas the play for her grandson addresses aspects of education. As Gregory's private politics illustrate, her class politics remained conservative. Her response in these plays is indicative of her struggle to come to terms with the disenfranchisement of the Anglo-Irish aristocracy.

¹⁴⁵ G.B. Shaw to Lady Gregory (28 April 1919), in Laurence/ (ed.), *Shaw, Lady Gregory and the Abbey*, pp. 144-145.

¹⁴⁶ Entry for 22 January 1920, *Journals I*, p. 120. Robert Gregory had put down his son's name for Harrow long before he was due to enter school. See Lady Gregory to Ruth Shine (23 May [?]), MS 35,824/3, Sir High Land and Mrs Ruth Shine Papers, National Library Ireland. Hereafter abbreviated NLI.

¹⁴⁷ Entry for 7 January 1923, *Journals I*, p. 425.

¹⁴⁸ Lady Gregory to Ruth Shine (17 December 1925), MS 35,824/3, Sir Hugh Lane and Mrs Ruth Shine Papers, NLI.

‘High Blood’: *Dave* (1927)

‘[H]igh blood and ancient blood’, says the character Nicholas O’Cahan in Gregory’s final original play *Dave*, ‘is the best property at all to run in a family’.¹⁴⁹ Written at a time of personal as well as national crisis in the mid-1920s, this drama was a meditation on the future of her home, Coole Park, in the absence of financial stability and a capable heir. The original idea and incentive to write ‘another play after all’ came to Gregory in late 1924. Working on a draft throughout the following spring, she finished the first typescript of *Dave* on 18 June 1925.¹⁵⁰ Gregory was at first reluctant to mention her new drama to Yeats as it was ‘a peasant play’ and therefore ‘on the Index’ as Yeats had told her that ‘Dublin won’t stand any more peasant work’ which, she believed, disqualified her drama. However, her primary concern at the end of her career was not a successful stage production, but the expression of an idea and ‘to get it right’.¹⁵¹

Dave is haunted by the actuality of Coole and the Gregorys’ legacy, challenging the playwright’s ideal conception of the house, described by one of its visitors, Signe Toksvig, as ‘the very hearth where Irish revival had warmed itself’.¹⁵² Set ‘[a] hundred years ago’, *Dave* is placed in the timeframe of famine (*CPIII* 349). It opens in a ‘well furnished’ room in the house of the O’Cahans, a childless couple of the landed middle class. Their marriage replicates that of Gregory who had married a man 35 years her senior; Kate O’Cahan is ‘a good deal younger’ than her ‘[e]lderly’ husband (*CPIII* 349). When the servant girl Josephine Loughlin enters, we learn that a ‘holy man’ is ‘Asking help [...] for the people of

¹⁴⁹ Lady Augusta Gregory, *Dave*, in Lady Augusta Gregory, *The Collected Plays, III, The Wonder and Supernatural Plays*, ed. Ann Saddlemyer (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1979), pp. 348-367; p. 353. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text, abbreviated *CPIII*.

¹⁵⁰ Entry for 18 October 1924, *Journals I*, p. 590; Entry for 15 March 1925 and 18 June 1925, *Journals II*, pp. 6, 15.

¹⁵¹ Entry for 25 May 1925, *Journals II*, pp. 12, 13.

¹⁵² Signe Toksvig, ‘A Visit to Lady Gregory’, *The North American Review*, vol. 214, no. 789 (August 1921), p. 191.

Iar Connacht that are down under the fever and the famine' (*CPIII* 350). With further references to 'the poorhouse', not introduced until the Poor Law Act of 1838, the connotation to the Famine of 1845-9 is established (*CPIII* 350). Considering the infamy of the 'Gregory clause', this indicates an autobiographical link that is reinforced by locating the play in the province of Connacht in which Coole is situated. Josephine's extensive description of people 'dying in empty walls with no roof over them', dead bodies 'thrown in a hole in the wild bog' and overcrowded poorhouses draws a vivid image of the scale of the distress. This imagery echoed Sir William's own memories of the time of Famine:

I well remember poor wretches being housed up against my demesne wall in wigwams of fir branches. There was no place to which they could be removed. The workhouse infirmary and sheds were crowded. Fortunately these patients did better in the pure open air than those who were packed together within four walls. There was nothing that I ever saw so horrible as the appearance of those who were suffering from starvation. The skin seemed drawn tight like a drum to the face, which became covered with small light-coloured hairs like a gooseberry. This, and their hollow voices, I can never forget, and yet they behaved with the greatest propriety.¹⁵³

The Famine context suggests a sense of guilt regarding her husband's legislative politics (*CPIII* 350, 351). This association, that earned the nickname 'Quarter Acre Gregory', is still prevalent in Ireland today.¹⁵⁴

While Gregory's repeated outline of her family's patrimony in Ireland's political landscape included a reference to her father-in-law who 'died from famine fever brought on through his ministrations to the poor', this self-sacrificial act conveniently disguised her husband's own political contribution.¹⁵⁵ As MP for Dublin, he had entered the parliamentary debate about Ireland's predicament in opposition to outdoor relief measures and objected to the policy of property paying for poverty.¹⁵⁶ Upon his suggestion, a clause was incorporated

¹⁵³ Gregory, *Sir William Gregory*, p. 140.

¹⁵⁴ Colman M. Cooke, 'Sir William Gregory: Politician, Colonial Governor Patron of the Arts, 1817-1892', *Journal of the Galway Archaeological and Historical Society*, vol. 37 (1979/1980), p. 35.

¹⁵⁵ Entry for 23 April 1920, *Journals I*, p. 148.

¹⁵⁶ Sir William referred to it as 'the disastrous perversity of the Government in throwing the feeding of a starving population on private enterprise'. See Gregory, *Sir William Gregory*, p. 141.

into the Poor Law Extension Act of 1847, restricting relief to those who did not own more than a quarter of an acre. Reverend John O'Rourke condemned the clause in his *History of the Famine* (1875), stating that '[a] more complete engine for the slaughter and degradation of a people was never designed'.¹⁵⁷ Thereby, the play is haunted by the burden of the past. Despite Kate's genuine empathy for 'The poor creatures!', she is unable to offer a practical approach to relief, but resorts to prayer: 'Lord have mercy on them, and bring them to the comfort of Heaven!' (*CPIII* 351). Her husband, in contrast, shows no interest in or regard for the circumstances beyond his doorstep, but is absorbed by his family's pedigree. The failing of active relief efforts by the representatives of the landed class can be understood as an acknowledgement and criticism of her echelon's lack of responsibility in Ireland's past in general, and a failing on the part of the Gregory family.

Her daughter-in-law's claim that 'Coole was a white elephant' directly challenged the playwright's insistence that it was not 'right to part with Richard's heritage', and that her grandson should decide 'whether it is a burden or a boon'.¹⁵⁸ Echoing her sentiments regarding land reform, Gregory wrote: 'Poor Richard, I seem to melt to nothing when I think of his birthright being sold in his infancy'.¹⁵⁹ Faced with the potential loss of Coole, their argument had resulted in Gregory's increasing idealization as she reflected repeatedly on four generations of the Gregory family:

Coole with its associations has been of some importance to the country through a century and a half, old Robert Gregory's [...] son [...] gathering that noble library; his other son William gaining respect for his large share in governing Ireland; William's Robert dying through his endeavours to help his famine stricken people, taking their fever as he fed and tended them; my husband's honoured representation of the county in Parliament; my son making visible through his art the beauty of what had been looked upon but as barrenness; dying and leaving a gallant record because he would not let others fight for the country's safety while he stayed at home.

¹⁵⁷ Rev. John O'Rourke, *The History of the Great Irish Famine of 1847, with Notices of Earlier Irish Famines*, 3rd edn (Dublin: James Duffy, 1902), p. 331.

¹⁵⁸ Entries for 8th, 13th, and 14th April 1920 and 1 August 1921, *Journals I*, pp. 137, 138, 140, 238.

¹⁵⁹ Entry for 18 May 1920, *Journals I*, p. 161.

Her justification was based on the twofold argument of her home's importance to the family's legacy on the one hand, and '[f]or Ireland's sake' on the other. '[T]he country', she believed, 'would be poorer without' it.¹⁶⁰ Yeats's comment that "'there is no country house in Ireland with so fine a record'" reinforced her idealism.¹⁶¹ She noted in the summer of 1922: 'I told [Yeats] he would be employed by the landowners who are moving from large estates to small to write poems showing they did it from virtue and not from necessity'.¹⁶²

By incorporating the Famine context, Gregory offered at once an apology and, arguably, perceived the decline of Coole as a justified result of her class's failure. Poignantly, *Dave* premiered at the Abbey on 9 May 1927, just a month after the ultimate sale of Coole Park was finalised.¹⁶³ In March, Coole had been lauded in the pages of the *Shooting Times*: 'This property will some day pass to Lady Gregory's little grandson, whose father was killed in France during the War'.¹⁶⁴ By October, representatives of the Land Commission and Forestry Department officially 'took over Coole, took possession' and, she bemoaned, '[i]t no longer belongs to anyone of our family or name'. She reflected on its tradition: 'It had a good name before I came here, its owners were of good, even of high, repute; and that has been continued, has increased, in Robert's time and mine'.¹⁶⁵ In early 1927, she had started to write her elegy, *Coole*, published in a limited run of 250 copies by Cuala Press in 1931.¹⁶⁶ Gregory's lament opened with Yeats's 'Coole Park, 1929', presenting their shared aesthetic vision of the house's family tradition reaching back to the eighteenth century:

Here traveller, scholar, poet, take your stand
When all those rooms and passages are gone,

¹⁶⁰ Entry for 1 August 1921, *Journals I*, p. 283. See also Entry for 23 April 1920, *ibid.*, p. 148.

¹⁶¹ Entry for 18 September 1921, *Journals I*, p. 292. The reflective and evaluative stance was further strengthened as she was 'beginning to work hard' on her autobiography from 1921 onwards. See Entry for 11 August 1921, *Journals I*, p. 285.

¹⁶² Entry for 2 July 1922, *Journals I*, p. 368.

¹⁶³ Entry for 1 April 1927, *Journals II*, p. 180. Gregory 'had the [Gregory] family vault on the estate bricked up' in 1927. She was buried with her sister Arabella at the municipal cemetery in Galway. See Kohfeldt, *The Woman Behind the Irish Renaissance*, p. 304.

¹⁶⁴ Entry for 2 March 1927, *Journals II*, p. 15.

¹⁶⁵ Entry for 20 October 1927, *Journals II*, p. 208.

¹⁶⁶ Entry for 1 January 1928, *Journals II*, p. 225.

When nettles wave upon a shapeless mound
 And saplings root among the broken stone,
 And dedicate – eyes bent upon the ground,
 Back turned upon the brightness of the sun
 And all the sensuality of the shade –
 A moment's memory to that laurelled head.¹⁶⁷

Yeats's myth of Coole facilitated and enhanced her own notion of the house as an embodiment of 'harmony, custom, ceremony, grace, taste, wisdom, nobility, greatness, and the coherence of self and world'.¹⁶⁸

Gregory attached great importance to her family's reputation, tradition and pedigree, exemplified by an ancestral book of the Gregory family.¹⁶⁹ Such a preoccupation with lineage is replicated in *Dave* in the character of Nicholas O'Cahan who is engrossed in reading a book of poetry:

NICHOLAS.	It is a great book. You would know, reading it, what people are worth nothing, and which of them are worth while.
KATE.	We'd mostly know that living anear them.
NICHOLAS.	Believe me, high blood and ancient blood is the best property at all to run in a family. [...] It is going through my mind that if the Lord had sent us a son we would find it hard to make our mind up what name to bestow on him, among all the big names in my family. [...] It is well enough for people with no genealogy to go seeking a name among the saints. But where there is family, it is right to show respect to the family. I should have a good deal of quality belonging to me (<i>CP III</i> 353).

Gregory, as demonstrated at the opening of this chapter, was well aware of the beneficial effects of a good name.¹⁷⁰ Nicholas's emphasis on the importance of names is confined to the surname as he considers his own 'name [...] well enough, but that likely may not have been in the world in those early years' (*CP III* 352). Yet, Nicholas, derived from Greek and

¹⁶⁷ William Butler Yeats, 'Coole Park', in Lady Augusta Gregory, *Coole*, ed. C. Smythe (Dublin, 1971), pp. 15-16.

¹⁶⁸ Natalie Crohn Schmitt, 'The Landscape Play: W.B. Yeats's "Purgatory"', *Irish University Review*, vol. 27, no. 2 (Autumn/Winter, 1997), p. 267.

¹⁶⁹ Notebook – Gregory Genealogy, Box 46, Folder 16, Emory.

¹⁷⁰ The Gregorys of Coole Park are said to be genealogically linked to the Gregory family of Styvechale Hall, considered to be a 'most ancient family' which can be 'traced back to the year 1162 to County Leicester, England. See Sir Bernard Burke, *A Genealogical and Heraldic History of the Landed Gentry of Great Britain and Ireland*, Volume 1 (London: Harrison, Pall Mall, 1879), p. 692.

meaning ‘the victory of the people’, is an apt choice for this character who purports that the survival of a surname through centuries establishes one’s pedigree and status, particularly if that name is carried through the ages in poems. He recites excitedly the surnames of those travelling from Munster, ‘the whole of them were in the battle of Clontarf’ (*CPIII* 352). Alongside the Kennedys, Lorcans, Morans, Brogans, O’Sullivans, O’Donovans and O’Mahers were the O’Cahans, joining forces with Brian Boru to fight the Vikings. O’Cahan, it is stated in John O’Hart’s *Irish Pedigrees*, poignantly referring to Ralph Waldo Emerson’s ‘Man is but the sum of his Ancestors’ on its title page, is associated with Coleraine, the ‘ancient and celebrated Irish territory of *Oireacht-Ui-Cathain* (or “The Clan of the O’Cahans”)¹⁷¹. Placing the family in the historical context of Brian Boru’s celebrated victory over the foreigner, Gregory revisits the legendary battle of the Munster king she had previously explored in her play *Kincora*. This double historical framework, referring back to the warfare of the Battle of Clontarf and the catastrophe of the Famine with its cataclysmic social and economic effects in the second half of the nineteenth century, is an opportune choice considering that Gregory was writing the play in the aftermath of both the Anglo-Irish War and the Irish Civil War of the early 1920s.

Pedigree and lineage were dependent on the politics of marriage, in order to secure a worthy, willing and capable heir. In *Dave*, Gregory addresses the issue of intermarriage between upper and lower classes. Nicholas O’Cahan tells his wife:

It is natural for you to be running down race. I am finding no fault with yourself. But it is the first time an O’Cahan ever joined with a Heniff! You’ll be saying, I suppose, that lad Dave, that is a foundling is not far from being equal to myself! (*CPIII* 353).

¹⁷¹ John O’Hart, *Irish Pedigrees; or, The Origin and Stem of the Irish Nation*, Limited American Edition in two Volumes, Vol. II (New York: P. Murphy & Son, 1915), p. 501.

His comment implies that he married a woman whose family lacked pedigree.¹⁷² Following Robert Gregory's engagement in 1907 to Margaret Graham Parry, a young Welsh woman whom he had met at the Slade School of Art in London, Gregory, who had noted in her diary that she was 'quite satisfied with Robert's choice', wrote candidly to her nephew Hugh Lane that it was 'no good pretending [she] is a heiress or a "catch" for she isn't'.¹⁷³ The word choice undermines the fiancé's lack of material wealth as well as pedigree. When discussing her grandson's education with George Bernard Shaw in 1919, Gregory was reminded that 'Tradition is all very well if it is kept whole'. With his choice in Margaret, Shaw continued, 'Robert broke the tradition'. It is implied in Shaw's remark that 'Robert was just on the verge of being overbred', that the decline of that high tradition was attributable, in part, to Gregory and her persistence in keeping with old traditions.¹⁷⁴ The damaging effects of an unfortunate choice in one's marriage partner were repeatedly alluded to by Gregory who noted in 1929 that 'but for English wives I believe goodwill would have been kept, and that with lessened acreage Roxborough might still have been the family home'.¹⁷⁵

With the birth of Gregory's grandson, Richard, in January 1909, the next generation of Gregorys had a male heir. Opportune for the moment, Gregory presented Yeats with an empty 'Ancestral Tablet' for the New Year, highlighting her preoccupation with family trees.¹⁷⁶ Six months after Richard's birth, Yeats noted:

I thought of this house, slowly perfecting itself and the life within it in ever-increasing intensity of labour, and then of its probably sinking away through

¹⁷² Notably, the surname 'Heniff' has no entries in the database of Irish surnames for the mid-nineteenth century. <http://www.irishtimes.com/ancestor/surname/> Accessed 28.12.2012.

¹⁷³ Gregory, *Seventy Years*, p. 411; Lady Gregory to Hugh Lane, Monday ([?8 August 1907]) quoted in James Pethica, "'Upon a House Shaken": The Struggle for Coole Park 1907-1912', *Yeats Annual 16: Poems and Contexts* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 4. The couple married on 26 September 1907 in London. Lady Gregory did not attend.

¹⁷⁴ George Bernard Shaw to Lady Gregory (28 April 1919) in Laurence/Grene (eds), *Shaw, Lady Gregory and the Abbey*, pp. 144-145.

¹⁷⁵ Entry for 28 January 1929, *Journals II*, p. 385. Note that Sir William's grandfather's brother, Richard Gregory, married a maid. As this was a childless marriage, his younger brother, William Gregory, inherited the estate upon his death. It was Richard Gregory who had filled the library at Coole with its valuable books. See Kohfeldt, *The Woman Behind the Irish Renaissance*, p. 49.

¹⁷⁶ Lady Gregory to William Butler Yeats (29 December 1908) quoted in Pethica, "'Upon a House'", p. 20.

courteous incompetence, or rather sheer weakness of will, for ability has not failed in young Gregory. [...] Is it not always the tragedy of the great and the strong that they see before the end the small and the weak, in friendship or in enmity, pushing them from their place and marring what they have built, and doing one or the other in mere lightness of mind?¹⁷⁷

Her friend's reservations regarding Robert Gregory's abilities as Coole's heir caused tensions. Asked by Gregory to write a poem in memory of her son in the aftermath of his death in 1918, Yeats's 'Shepherd and Goatherd', by comparing Robert to 'a cuckoo,/ No settled man', showcases 'an unassertive and indistinct figure who never took true possession of Coole Park'.¹⁷⁸ Likewise, in *Dave*, despite O'Cahan musing over possible names for a son, his remains a childless marriage. In 'Coole and Ballylee, 1931', Yeats indirectly refers to Richard as 'a last inheritor / Where none has reigned lacked a name and fame'. Yet, with 'that high horse riderless', Coole's heritage comes to a close.¹⁷⁹ Coole's envisioned exceptional status was tainted, in reality, by its inability to produce an able heir. As Gregory wrote in 1930, the year of Richard's coming of age: 'I wish some one of our blood would after my death care enough for what has been a home for so long to keep it open'.¹⁸⁰

In *Dave*, the eponymous orphaned boy working on the O'Cahan estate is introduced by the master of the house as '[a] lad whose race and kindred no one knows, and whose father and mother no one knows'. Upon finishing her first draft of the play, Gregory noted that 'the real subject is the young man from whom a devil was cast out'.¹⁸¹ Presented as a branded character, Dave bears the burden of 'the sins of the generations before him'. Constantly encountering verbal abuse, he has adopted the belief that 'He brought badness into the world with him, the same as you might bring a birthmark' (*CPIII* 354-355). This evil nature is attributed to his lack of pedigree which leads to the debate within the play

¹⁷⁷ '16 September [1909]', William Butler Yeats, *Memoirs*, ed. by Denis Donoghue (London: Macmillan, 1972), p. 230.

¹⁷⁸ Yeats, *Poems*, p. 193; Pethica, 'Yeats's "perfect man"', p. 18.

¹⁷⁹ Yeats, *Poems*, pp. 294, 295.

¹⁸⁰ Entry for 5 January 1930, *Journals II*, pp. 485-486.

¹⁸¹ Entry for 19 May 1925, *Journals II*, p. 11.

concerning whether Dave's nature is biologically predetermined or whether he is the victim of environmental circumstances. Having accepted the others' opinion of himself, Dave, in resignation, attempts in an act of revenge to burn down the O'Cahans' home. Redeemed by the Lady of the house's empathy, Dave refrains from any violent activity and, instead, his previous anger turns into benevolent philanthropy as he sets out to help those in need.

This opens the debate of the individual's worthiness in society, high culture and low culture, and the development of character by either genetics or environmental impact. Nicholas O'Cahan's viewpoint and idealism in *Dave* is juxtaposed with Kate's pragmatism and belief in the potential good in everyone, offering the audience the counter-argument that one's status is determined more by active, beneficent participation in society than by an extensive and distinguished family tree. She judges people by their behaviour, not by their name. '[I]t's often I heard said there is no child comes into the world but brings with him some grain of the wisdom of Heaven', she explains, 'The Spirit of God given in the beginning wasn't given to one or to two' (*CPIII* 355). This belief in the divine in human nature annuls her husband's claim of class distinctions. Yet it is the terminology of 'high blood', 'ancient blood', 'race' and 'quality' that transforms *Dave*, categorized among the wonder and supernatural plays, into a politically charged and contentious reflection of Gregory's class attitudes. It is in regard to these preoccupations in *Dave* that it can be considered as a key – yet hitherto unexplored – precursor to Yeats's penultimate play, *Purgatory*.

The compound of genetic and environmental impact becomes the focal point of the play. Dave is a seventeen-year old who is believed to be 'likely a tinker's brat' (*CPIII* 355). 'What could there be in you but badness', Timothy says to Dave, 'you that were left at the side of a ditch by vagabonds of tinkers that were travelling the roads of the world since the day of the Crucifixion!' (*CPIII* 358). Kate, in opposition, asks: 'is it his fault, being as he was

a child without a home?’ (*CPIII* 361). Throughout the play, she comes to the boy’s defense, stipulating that ‘He was maybe born into his troubles’ and arguing ‘It’s easy be good having good means and a good way and plenty of riches’ (*CPIII* 355). The lower classes, it is implied, have only limited access to education and any lack of intellect is due to lack of opportunity rather than any innate deficiency of character.¹⁸² Empathy and kindness are perceived to be forthcoming only to those representatives of higher blood; Dave has encountered, until this point, no empathy.

Nicholas O’Cahan in *Dave* is the only bookish character, reading, as he does, a book of poetry and stressing the importance of one’s ancestry being commemorated in literature. In fact, the educational discrepancy between husband and wife is foregrounded by Kate’s admission that ‘I never got learning out of books’ (*CPIII* 355). With these class distinctions in the marriage, it might be Kate’s lower status which accounts for her empathy for, and defensiveness of, Dave. Her belief in the inherent good in human nature offers a stark contrast to her husband’s elitism; Timothy’s iteration that Dave’s ‘badness’ is like a ‘birthmark’ suggests that wickedness is something irredeemable and unchangeable, irrespective of circumstances. Although Nicholas acknowledges that Dave should ‘learn behaviour’, he immediately concedes that he ‘would not be hard on you, as I would on one who had a good rearing and a good name’ (*CPIII* 355). O’Cahan’s diverging set of morals testifies to his judgment of others according to their social standing. Thus, Gregory provides her audience with a nuanced argument, despite such extreme elements culminating when

¹⁸² Note that Gregory’s great-uncle, Henry Stratford Persse, was involved in famine relief measures when Galway was hit by a crisis in 1822. He and his wife took in five children whose parents had been sent to a Fever Hospital. Among them was a little Irish-speaking girl of three, Miss Mary [Polly] Geary. He wrote to his sons: ‘Just now pause and reflect. Here was a little female child, that if educated and taken care of had all the essentials to be a Queen, felt like a deserted cat to perish in the streets, and this is the system that is “the envy of surrounding nations and the admiration of the World.” [...] I never saw a gentleman’s child that has such pretty manners ... this Polly Geary is the Child that the aristocracy would fain make us believe was a *different species* of the human race, “papist Devils that nothing could civilize or amend”’. Henry Stratford Persse to his sons (10 July 1822), quoted in James L. Pethica and James Charles Roy, “Nothing but Misery All Round Me”: Henry Stratford Persse and the Galway Famine of 1822’, *Journal of the Galway Archaeological and Historical Society*, vol. 47 (1995), pp. 26, 11.

Timothy tells the young boy that ‘you not to have come into the world would be no loss at all’ (*CPIII* 355).¹⁸³

Furthermore, the question of nature versus nurture is tied to the theme of violence. In *Dave*, the fear of a direct threat to the O’Cahan house is voiced early on in the play. As the couple is due to leave their home to motor into town, Kate fearfully says: ‘I hope no bad thing will happen [to] the house, and we away from it through the whole of the night time’ (*CPIII* 354). This echoes Gregory’s own experiences and concerns in the aftermath of the First World War. Violence soon occurred closer to home with the outbreak of the Anglo-Irish War in January 1919, causing ‘An exodus from the County’ as the landed élite either permanently left Ireland or awaited abroad the unfolding development of the fight for independence.¹⁸⁴ During the revolutionary years Coole’s existence came under threat as many Big Houses were attacked. At a time of social and political upheaval, Gregory realized that ‘I, alone, can only go on living here if I have the goodwill of the people, and indeed I have done nothing to lose or lessen it’.¹⁸⁵ Thus, the landed class depended on the trust endowed to them by the lower classes. In May 1920, the old steward’s house of Richard Gregory was ‘burned down in the night’.¹⁸⁶ The maid soon after informed her that Father Considine finished his Church service: “‘And the third thing I have to speak of is injustice – the burning at Coole’”, and he is said to have ‘banged his book and said no more’.¹⁸⁷ Two years later, in May 1922, late-night visitors knocked on her door and an ‘unpleasant bullying voice’ demanded that she ‘[o]pen or it will be the worse for you’. Refusing the command in silence, Gregory feared a forceful break-in, but nothing further happened. The incident nonetheless caused her to

¹⁸³ Equally, the audience is presented with the complementary argument, expressed by Timothy and Josephine soon after the O’Cahans have left the house: ‘If they never came back they’ll be no great loss!’ (*CPIII* 356).

¹⁸⁴ Entry for 22 January 1920, *Journals I*, p. 120. By the end of the 1920s, the Protestant population in the Free State constituted 7.4 per cent. See R.F. Foster, *Modern Ireland 1600-1972* (London: Penguin, 1988), p. 534.

¹⁸⁵ Entry for 20 August 1921, *Journals I*, p. 287.

¹⁸⁶ Entry for 20 May 1920, *Journals I*, p. 166.

¹⁸⁷ Entry for 3 June 1920, *Journals I*, pp. 168-169.

‘constantly feel a slight nervousness’ that was long-lasting.¹⁸⁸ While Coole Park was spared the fate of other ‘Burned Mansions’ such as Moore Hall, her co-Revivalist George Moore’s property, the burning of her childhood home, Roxborough, in the summer of 1922 was a personal blow that deepened her fears regarding Coole.¹⁸⁹ ‘It is a shock’, she noted, as it ‘seemed so safe and permanent’.¹⁹⁰ Visiting the ‘sad’ sight in October 1924, she noted the contrast between the ‘blackened’ and ‘silent’ ruined estate and the ‘much improved’ houses of their old tenants with ‘flowers in the windows’ and ‘gates to yards’, a reflection on both the economic and social changes in independent Ireland.¹⁹¹ ‘Mine is the only one of all our family houses now inhabited’, Gregory wrote by the end of that year.¹⁹² Ten days after that visit, she noted the initial idea for *Dave*, based on her mantra ‘instead of striving to get to Heaven striving to bring Heaven about us on earth’.¹⁹³

The reversal of roles between landlord and tenant, master and servant is enacted in *Dave*. Following the O’Cahans’ departure, their servants, Timothy and Josephine, expose their hypocrisy as the former mocks ‘Himself and his ancient generations!’ Although his own attitude toward Dave is not demonstrative of altruism, he criticizes the master of the house for ‘looking at myself over the top of it as if I was dirt!’, adding that ‘If I didn’t make up my mind to humour him I’d like well to face him on the head of that’ (*CPIII* 356-357). A tension is apparent in his remark, with the threat of violence lurking beneath the surface. By sitting in the master’s chair and replicating Nicholas’ superior attitude, Josephine and Timothy respectively place themselves in the position of their social superiors. Finding the keys to the

¹⁸⁸ Entry for 13 May 1922, *Journals I*, pp. 354-355. Less than a week later, Coole received protection from two young Free State soldiers. See Entry for 19 May 1922, *Journals I*, p. 357.

¹⁸⁹ ‘Burned Mansions’, *The Irish Times* (5 August 1922), p. 5. Gregory noted in October 1922 that upon the arrival of a messenger she ‘thought perhaps Coole had been burned down’. See Entry for 26 October 1922, *Journals I*, p. 405.

¹⁹⁰ Entry for 3 May 1922, *Journals I*, p. 352. She noted in August that ‘this new outburst of burning country houses [was] a bad sign’. Furthermore, she sadly remarked that ‘Only the chimneys left standing at Roxborough. See Entries for 1 August 1922 and 12 November 1922, *Journals I*, pp. 382, 410.

¹⁹¹ Entry for 8 October 1924, *Journals I*, p. 588.

¹⁹² Lady Gregory to Una (Birch) Pope-Hennessy (14 December 1924), Berg.

¹⁹³ Entry for 18 October 1924, *Journals I*, p. 590.

chest of drawers that holds the family's riches, the two discover a 'grand shawl', 'silk skirt', whiskey, 'linen sheets', 'towels of the finest flax', a silver teapot and a stocking 'full of golden guineas'. 'I would be well pleased [...] to have a lady's life', Josephine proclaims, placing the grand shawl around her shoulders (*CPIII* 357). In this passage, Gregory envisions the future of estates such as Coole when they are inhabited by the advancing Catholic middle class or when the servants have become the masters.

When Dave returns to the room and finds both of them with O'Cahan's stocking full of golden guineas, Timothy diverts Dave's attention from the transgression by continuing his abuse of the boy. For the first time, the audience now hears Dave's story:

There is no wrong thing ever I did since I came to the place but you have it told out ere this, and ten times as much told, and the most made of it, and the worst, the way I never got a penny in my hand for wages, but all stopped for fines or for punishment. I don't know at all what is it holds me back from doing every crime and every robbery, when there could not be put upon me a worse name for badness than what is put upon me now. [...] Didn't I hear enough of that story the seventeen years I am in the world? In the poorhouse, in the street, in this house, nothing but the one bad word. I got no chance in any corner but what my two hands gave me and God! I don't know in the world wide what kept me back that I didn't kill and destroy the whole of ye, and bring down the roof over your head (*CPIII* 358).

Preconceived prejudices, it is intimated, can result in revengeful and violent behaviour. Predictably, the growing tensions resulting from a sense of being mistreated and misjudged lead to an attempt at retribution when Dave considers 'burn[ing] the house and all that's in it' to avenge 'the world that gave [him] nothing only insult' (*CPIII* 358, 359). Josephine and Timothy quickly recognize their own potential gain and propose to steal, set fire to the house and share the profits equally, exemplifying the lower-class's greedy self-interest. The burning of the house is only avoided by the O'Cahans' premature return. Caught with 'the lighted wisp in his hand', Dave is immediately deemed guilty and, after acting the saviour by knocking Dave (the 'ruffian') unconscious, Timothy manipulates the situation in his favour (*CPIII* 359). Accusing Dave of theft and arson 'With the dint of drunkenness', he falsely

reports that Dave ‘rose the shovel at me to let my blood, and maybe knock out my brains’, adding attempted murder to the list of charges (*CP*III 360).

The element of potential and enacted violence is closely linked to a supernatural, visionary component. Apart from Gregory’s *leitmotif* of bringing heaven to earth, *Dave* is driven by the idea she had heard in a workhouse that ‘There is no child comes into the world but brings with him some grain of wisdom of Heaven’. This sentiment, she felt, was ‘brought nearer to dramatic expression’ in George Russell’s poem ‘Exiles’. In its three verses, Russell celebrates the ‘wild peasantry’ who, unknown to themselves, ‘carry with them diadem and sceptre / And move from throne to throne’ (*CP*III 400). Dedicating *Dave* to Russell (‘A.E.’), Gregory taps into this idealization of the peasantry. Accustomed to the negativity and prejudices he encountered as an orphaned boy, Dave has assimilated the identity he has been given – one which is ‘all badness, without goodness or grace’ – and does not fear the consequences of any acts of revenge he might commit (*CP*III 364). However, Kate presents him with a last hope: ‘I declare to my God it’s often I’d have choked the breath out of yourself and your master’, Dave asserts, ‘if it wasn’t there is a look of pity in the old woman’s face, if she hasn’t the courage to stretch a hand to me itself’ (*CP*III 358). In the end, Kate is crucial in enabling Dave to realize his potential and save himself. Her role as enabler or beholder of ‘the saving message’ had been embodied in an earlier draft by ‘a ragged woman’ referred to as the ‘Servant of Poverty’, suggesting her affinity with Cathleen ní Houlihan.¹⁹⁴

As Kate re-enters the room and finds Dave unconscious, tied at his hands and feet, she ‘looks at him’ and ‘lights a candle’ to set the atmosphere for the following scene (*CP*III 361). She rejects the other men’s ‘too hasty and too hard’ judgment of Dave, rising to his defence by blaming circumstances rather than innate characteristics for any potential or actual violent

¹⁹⁴ Entries for 26 March 1925 and 6 October 1925, *Journals II*, pp. 8, 48.

behaviour (*CPIII* 361). Blessing him with a cross and praying to the ‘King of Mercy [to] come to his help’, Kate sings a hymn summoning an Eden-like place (*CPIII* 363). ‘It was nearly as if I was a king’s son or a great gentleman’, Dave tells Kate in disbelief, echoing ideas in Russell’s poem. His vision, evoked by Kate’s hymn with its references to ‘gardens’, ‘no hunger’ and where ‘trees for evermore bear fruit’, presents the ‘miracle’ of the play. Considering the celebratory scene with the lighting of the candle and the process of washing – a cleansing of sins and the wounds of violence – Kate carries out a metaphorical exorcism. Dave afterwards finds himself saved and, for the first time, believes in the ‘good’ in himself: ‘you are the first ever said that to me’, he tells Kate when she refers to his goodness.¹⁹⁵ Notably, ‘Dave’ originates from the Hebrew, ‘David’, and means ‘beloved’. Through the process of washing the wound on Dave’s head interlaced with the hymn ‘Song of Mary, Mother of Christ’ we witness a baptism or rebirth that restores the boy’s sense of self-worth. Reminiscent of Lawrence Scarry’s change of heart after the intervention of his wife’s ghost, Dave refrains from his previous desire for revenge, dismisses his preceding actions as a ‘foolish thing’ and his earlier destructive mission turns into the desire ‘to give help to [...] my people’ (*CPIII* 365). By retrospectively calling his attempt at arson ‘foolish’, Gregory subtly incorporates her own view of the cultural value of Coole’s material existence, and enacts a dramatic judgment on those who would threaten it. Thus, we observe a retreat from violence, in line with the playwright’s pacifism, as we hear Dave proclaim that he has ‘no wish to do hurt or harm’ (*CPIII* 365). His outbound journey is driven by a philanthropic aspiration and contributes to the recreation of the heavenly place on earth. Considering its historical

¹⁹⁵ Compare Gregory’s journal entry for 2 November 1924 in which she quotes from Dostoyevsky’s *The Possessed* (1872) [*Demons*]: “‘They’re bad because they don’t know they’re good ... They’ll find out that they are good and they’ll all become good every one of them’”, *Journals I*, p. 600.

provenance, *Dave* represents not only a hopeful but utopian vision for an independent Ireland which has experienced and transcended violent conflict.¹⁹⁶

Yet the visionary element is central to the play, as Dave's actions are directly influenced by his ability to see beyond the natural world. Entering into the dreamscape of heaven carries with it associations of madness, directly mentioned in Yeats's play and a subject he had previously broached with his patroness. Shortly after she had finished her first typescript of *Dave*, Gregory noted in her diary that 'Yeats had talked of madness, how it destroys a family, brings them down'. Although in agreement, she conceded that 'some fine thing comes of it, [...] perhaps the very shattering sets the imagination free, or takes away fear of consequences and so gives courage'.¹⁹⁷ In line with their variant views, *Dave* ends on an optimistic, albeit nostalgic, note. Kate 'tearfully' watches Dave leaving the estate, and contemplates following him to 'wear out what is left of my life [...] and maybe get more respect than ever I got here, with my name not showing out in any old book!' (CPIII 367). '[A]gitated', Nicholas pleads for her to stay with him, promises 'never [to] bring down my pedigree upon you again' and symbolically 'flings the book on the hearth' (CPIII 367).

The exclusively Catholic characters in Gregory's play suggest the Protestant landed gentry's marginalized position in the evolving Free State. Elizabeth Bowen wrote in the eulogy to her own home, *Bowen's Court*: 'In the life of what we call the new Ireland [...] the lives of my own people become a little thing'.¹⁹⁸ Although the distinction between the classes remains intact by the end of the play, Gregory's class – by its exclusion – is relieved from the burden of responsibility to contribute politically and socially on a large scale. The future is laid in the hands of the lowest class, Yeats's 'beggar-man', whose turning away from violence and toward benevolence was enabled by Kate's symbolic baptism. Kate's disbelief

¹⁹⁶ Margaret had written to Gregory in August 1922 that 'I envy you your blind optimism'. See Entry for 7 August 1922, *Journals I*, p. 386.

¹⁹⁷ Entry for 20 September 1925, *Journals II*, p. 40.

¹⁹⁸ Elizabeth Bowen, *Bowen's Court* (Cork: The Collins Press, 1998), p. 437.

in her husband's ability to change suggests Gregory's own lingering elitism and nostalgia for the old ways. As she noted in 1929, her grandson's coming of age was not destined to be 'the coming into ownership of his property and home – that were owned by the generations before him'.¹⁹⁹ The demise of her class's power is acknowledged and the end of Coole heritage in part accepted as an inevitability.

Gregory's apparently endless optimism at a time when the Free State was in its infancy, exemplified by her relentless effort to keep Coole as the family home, and her continuing belief that its cultural 'boon' outweighed its financial 'burden', was muted by her realization and acceptance of the fact that 'the days of landed property have passed'. 'It is better so', she added.²⁰⁰ With some reluctance, she accepted the reality of a process she had already predicted in the 1880s: 'the country will never be quite the same again', she wrote, 'for good or ill the change has come'. Her question, 'how is love to take place of bitterness; and sympathy to bind class with class instead of hatred keeping them asunder', finds its answer in *Dave*.²⁰¹ Gregory's play ends with remarks such as 'the world is turned to be very queer' and 'the way the wheel is going around', reflecting the changes in Irish society (*CPH* 367). Kate's last words, 'May friends and angels be around him and steer him to a good harbor in the Paradise of the King!', resonate like a prayer, a blessing of the Free State and a resignation from her class's responsibilities in and to the new Ireland (*CPH* 367). Through its themes, *Dave* offers an apology for her class's failings in the past, a defense for its enabling function and an abdication of its former responsibilities.

Dave was perceived by *The Irish Times* as 'true to the oldest traditions of the Abbey Theatre' with its 'mystical Kiltartanese'.²⁰² Similarly, *The Stage* commented on "her keen

¹⁹⁹ Entry for 31 December 1929, *Journals II*, p. 482.

²⁰⁰ Entry for 5 January 1930, *Journals II*, pp. 485-486.

²⁰¹ Gregory, 'An Emigrant's Notebook', Box 46, Folder 8, p. 53. Emory.

²⁰² 'Abbey Theatre', *The Irish Times* (10 May 1927), p. 5.

sense of humour”’.²⁰³ Its mysticism and perceived comedic aspects possibly account for the critical neglect it has received. St. John Ervine dismissively wrote in the *Observer* that its meaning ‘eludes me’.²⁰⁴ Gregory was disappointed by a ‘great carelessness in the production’. ‘Instead of a rather superior room of a hundred years ago’, she remarked, ‘it was a poverty stricken kitchen with a quite new and vulgar rosewood chair’ and ‘a common small looking-glass on the wall’. Such commonness and vulgarity could only be addressed by someone acquainted with the aesthetics of the upper classes: she replaced one piece of furniture with ‘one of the straw seated chairs’ that she had taken, rather fittingly, from Chevy Chase, her family’s hunting lodge, added ‘an old oil portrait’, and ‘improved the costumes’.²⁰⁵ The stage, ironically, offered a platform where the furniture of former grand houses could function as decorations; as Yeats noted in September 1930: ‘Coole as a Gregory house is near its end, it will be before long an office and residence for foresters, a little cheap furniture in the great rooms’.²⁰⁶ The landed gentry’s role in the Free State had become more decorative than shaping.

Gregory realized, towards the end of her life, that ‘this house [...] is likely to be broken up at my death’.²⁰⁷ Although she struggled ‘to think of a deserted Coole’, she acknowledged a year before her death that ‘it is time for me to give in & go out’.²⁰⁸ Yet, she had fulfilled her responsibility and had kept what was once a grand estate, associated with political power, as a family home. More than that, the Irish novelist Kate O’Brien wrote in *My Ireland*:

Coole had no enemies and was not burnt, but passed peacefully in its time to the Irish Government. And it is only by a fluke, by that fluke of fame that Augusta Gregory, the last Lady Gregory, brought to it in serving Irish literature what

²⁰³ Entry for 25 May 1927, *Journals II*, p. 190.

²⁰⁴ Entry for 11 July 1928, *Journals II*, p. 292.

²⁰⁵ Entry for 12 May 1927, *Journals II*, p. 187.

²⁰⁶ ‘Pages from a Diary written in Nineteen Hundred and Thirty’ (11 September 1930), in William Butler Yeats, *Explorations* (New York: Macmillan, 1989), p. 319.

²⁰⁷ Entry for 23 February 1928, *Journals II*, p. 234.

²⁰⁸ Entries for 14 February 1932 and 2 May 1931, *Journals II*, pp. 629, 615.

within half of one life-time it changed from an unassuming country house into a landmark and a national pride. And only just before it died.²⁰⁹

Gregory held true her proclamation of the 1880s – she did ‘die game’.

O’Brien’s reference to Gregory’s service to Irish literature is an apt comment which she repeatedly emphasised: “‘She was like a serving maid amongst us”, said some old man about the place where she died. She was a serving maid to the Abbey Theatre too’.²¹⁰

Gregory would have approved of such an appraisal of her work. Glued in at the bottom of Gregory’s journal of the year 1931 is a press cutting with the following quote from Padraic Pearse:

I propose that we take *service* as our touchstone, and reject all other touchstones; and that without bothering our heads about sorting out, segregation, and labelling Irishmen and Irishwomen according to their opinions, we agree to accept as fellow-Nationalists all who specifically or virtually recognise this Irish nation as an entity and, being part of it, owe it and give it their service.²¹¹

Adrian Frazier argues that ‘an inchoate feeling of class guilt’ was ‘the well of Lady Gregory’s creativity, as she sought to make reparations through her privilege, wealth, and talent to the Irish nation’.²¹² However, *The Dragon* and *The Jester* indicate an unapologetic embrace of elitism.

As has been demonstrated, service was one of the key themes in Gregory’s plays, including *Shanwalla* and *Dave*. In both texts, aspects of guilt surface with regard to irresponsible behaviour of the landed class that resulted in class tensions. However, the recurring theme of heredity and Gregory’s concerns regarding the transmission of the family’s estate exposes an undeniable and unapologetic elitism. What emerges from these plays is a complex attitude toward class politics in which aspects of liberalism, elitism, and conservatism are prevalent. Despite the declining status of Gregory’s class and family legacy, it was the playwright’s national and international fame that secured her the income to support

²⁰⁹ Kate O’Brien, *My Ireland* (London: B.T. Batsford Ltd., 1962), p. 48.

²¹⁰ O’Brien, *My Ireland*, p. 50.

²¹¹ Entry for 17 April 1931, *Journals II*, p. 609.

²¹² Frazier, *Behind the Scenes*, p. 203.

the estate. As this chapter has illustrated, Gregory's public political alignment with the republican cause in the aftermath of the Easter Rising was paralleled by an increasing conservatism in her private class politics.

Conclusion

Her place depends on her achievement as a dramatist. [...] Our Theatre would not be open to-day save for her. Lady Gregory was – is – the Abbey Theatre.

- Lennox Robinson¹

‘As playwright’, Gregory wrote in April 1929 considering her diverse set of roles as theatre director, lecturer, Gaelic Leaguer and rebel whilst writing her autobiography *Seventy Years*, ‘there is not much to say’.² Yet, as this study of her dramatic work has demonstrated, there is, in fact, a lot to say about Gregory the playwright. The historicizing and contextualizing approach has enabled a nuanced reading of the socio-political, bibliographical, and autobiographical influences on Gregory’s dramatic oeuvre. Unpublished essays, diaries, correspondence, holograph drafts of plays, and financial records are vital parts, which – when brought into a dynamic relationship with the dramatic works – establish the ‘biographies’ of individual plays, tracing their provenance, textual history, production history, and reception. In so doing, Gregory’s earlier political writings from the 1880s and 1890s are identified as a vital component in our understanding of the playwright’s work both with regard to key themes and approach.

Particularly, Gregory’s first publication of ‘Arabi and his Household’ emerges as crucial. Yet rather than the point of origin in the all-too-often adapted conversion narrative of Gregory’s move from unionism toward nationalism, it demonstrated Gregory’s power – and her realization of such – in shaping public opinion. Through writing, she adapted the position of a public moralist with the intention to educate and reform her audience. Early on, she addressed the reading audience of British as well as Irish newspapers, periodicals, and political pamphlets. Whether in the case of Arabi or in the case of ‘A Phantom’s Pilgrimage’,

¹ Lennox Robinson (ed.), *Lady Gregory’s Journals 1916-1930* (London: Putnam & Company, 1946), pp. 51, 53.

² Entry for 24 April 1929, D.J. Murphy (ed.), *Lady Gregory’s Journals: Volume Two, Books 30-44, 21 February 1925-9 May 1932* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1987), p. 430. Hereafter cited as *Journals II*.

public politics were tested according to their impact on the private. Later, her audience sat in the auditorium of the Abbey Theatre. Here, the tensions between public and private politics remained one of Gregory's principal concerns as both playwright and as director.

When Yeats dismissively estimated that his friend 'belonged to a political world, or one that is merely social' instead of to an artistic one, he failed to realize the importance of precisely that insight to Gregory's dramatic art.³ Her time in and political response to Egypt at the brink of its occupation and her observation of the benefits of the civil service in India, the initial unfamiliarity with Catholicism and her philanthropic evangelicalism among the poor in both Britain and Ireland, the responsibilities of a custodian of a landed estate and her duty to protect the family legacy equipped her with personal experiences that distinguished Gregory from her fellow directors at the Abbey. In consequence, her dramatic work emerges as an active engagement with these different spheres of influences.

The Abbey Theatre's educational aspirations were in keeping with Gregory's assumed role of a public moralist in the late nineteenth century. Her plays' emphasis on themes such as divided loyalties, inter-class relations, education, and marriage pertained to questions of morality, which – for Gregory – placed them outside the sphere of politics. Rather than presenting her audience with direct answers regarding contemporary political debates, her apt method of writing plays with double or open endings was particularly suitable to her educative and moral intentions. In so doing, she challenged and encouraged her audience to consider and reflect on their own priorities. While Gregory's intent was in raising questions of morality and creating a space for dialogue, the politicization of Irish society with the founding of Sinn Féin in 1905, for instance, meant that the audience was more inclined toward a political interpretation of plays such as *The Rising of the Moon* and *The Gaol Gate*.

³ [8 August 1910], William Butler Yeats, *Memoirs*, ed. Denis Donoghue (London: Macmillan, 1972), pp. 257-258.

Audience reception and production histories thus illustrate the discrepancies between authors' intentions and audience's responses.

Gregory's interrogative and critical stance was further cloaked by her primary association with the genre of comedy that was perceived – and supposed to function – primarily as entertainment rather than intellectual stimulant; her one-act comedies were to keep the Abbey afloat as interludes to Yeats's more demanding work. In a 1906 memorandum it was stated: 'The popularity of the Theatre at this moment depends upon two writers Mr Boyle and Lady Gregory; I do not say that individual plays by other writers have not assisted them but these are the only two writers who can be counted upon to draw audiences'.⁴

Gregory's dominance on the Abbey stage began in 1907 with 181 performances, reaching its climax between 1911 and 1914 with an extraordinary 349 performances in 1912 out of which 93 alone were *The Rising of the Moon*. Such a monopoly was negatively commented upon by Frank Fay, who wrote to W.J. Lawrence in that year:

I hope you have counted and will publish the number of times the pieces of that selfish old lady have been published. I viewed her entrance into our movement with distrust, from the first. ... One of these days if someone doesn't do it, I shall count the number of times her pieces have been played up to the time we left. ... Yeats and Gregory have grabbed the thing for themselves that was meant for the country.⁵

Indeed, the aspect of genre might be seen to have obscured her reputation as well as the complexity and variety of her dramatic work. When Yeats wrote to Synge in 1906, he surmised that 'Comedy must make the ship sail, but the ship must have other things in the cargo'.⁶ This study has illustrated that Gregory contributed 'other things' apart from comedy,

⁴ 'To the Directors of the National Theatre Society' (2 December 1906) in John Kelly and Ronald Schuchard (eds), *The Collected Letters of W.B. Yeats, Volume Four: 1905-1907* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 528.

⁵ Frank Fay to W.J. Lawrence ([1912]) quoted in Robert Hogan, Richard Burnham and Daniel P. Poteet (eds), *The Rise of the Realists 1910-1915* (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1979), p. 205.

⁶ William Butler Yeats to J.M. Synge (17 May 1906) in Ann Saddlemyer, *Theatre Business: The Correspondence of the first Abby Theatre Directors* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1982), p. 126.

and even in her comic contributions we can identify an underlying political context that is veiled by the genre. To this end, the uncovering of production histories is vital to a fuller understanding of Gregory's relationship with her audience. As illustrated in connection with *The Rising of the Moon* and *The Gaol Gate*, in particular, individual plays gained in value through performance in a particular historical moment. *The Gaol Gate*'s staging in a Parisian drawing-room at a time of the Mountjoy hunger strike demonstrated a topicality that reached beyond national borders and – with the revival in 1971 – beyond contemporary concerns.

Notably, however, the density of Gregory's work – both in terms of her productivity and production figures – declined from 1914 onwards, marked by the outbreak of the Great War and the accelerating revolutionary years in Ireland. From this period onward, private concerns regarding the transmission of Coole estate, her son's enlistment and subsequent death in 1918 came more and more into focus in Gregory's drama as demonstrated in regard to *Shanwalla*, *The Dragon*, *The Jester*, and *Dave*. While Gregory's status gradually shifted from landowner to tenant, her home country emerged as a Free State. The changes in political and social life she had predicted in the 1880s had materialized by the 1920s and the playwright increasingly focused on private politics as well as pondering her class's role in an emerging independent state. Whereas plays such as *The Rising of the Moon* and *The Gaol Gate* continued to resonate with the emotions of the revolutionary years, the increasingly bourgeois and nationalist audience of the Abbey failed to connect with dramatic works such as *The Wrens*, *Shanwalla*, and *Dave*.

Looking over her old copybooks of the drafts of *Spreading the News* late in life, she commented: 'it is not the critic but the audience that is the test of failure or success'.⁷ Thus, if we would take Gregory at her word, her dramatic work appears to have failed. Between 1933

⁷ Lady Gregory, *Seventy Years*, ed. Colin Smythe (New York: Macmillan, 1974), p. 412.

and 2011, twelve of Gregory's plays were revived at intermittent periods, amounting to 450 productions. This decreases to 19 per cent her former domination of 55 per cent.⁸

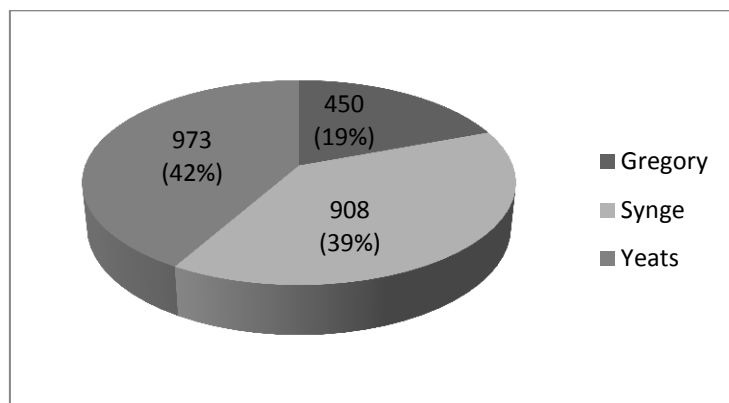


Figure 5 Productions of Plays 1933-2011

Among the revivals we find the same plays that established her as a regular on the Abbey stage. In recent years, they have become rarities on the stage of Ireland's national theatre. *The Rising of the Moon* leads the way with 120 performances, still outnumbering *Cathleen ni Houlihan* (112), followed by *The Workhouse Ward* (72), *Spreading the News* (65) and *Hyacinth Halvey* (53).⁹ In comparison, Yeats's reputation as a dramatist has significantly increased as reflected in 973 productions, totalling 42 per cent of the former triumvirate of the Abbey's directorate. Synge's visibility on the theatre's stage remains stable with 908 productions. What we witness is a telling reversal in proportions, whereby Gregory's proclivity to reach success with one-act comedies becomes replaced by the canonical works of her co-directors. The last revival of one of her plays, as part of the Abbey Theatre centenary celebrations in 2004, was – appropriately for the occasion – *Spreading the News*;

⁸ Data has been collected from the Abbey Theatre Online Archive. <http://www.abbeytheatre.ie/archives/> Accessed 24.06.2013.

⁹ Also revived were *Coats*, *Damer's Gold*, *Dervorgilla*, *The Canavans*, *The Doctor in Spire of Himself*, *The Gaol Gate*, *The Old Woman Remembers* and *The Story Brought by Brigit*.

with only one performance it was more of a token revival that acknowledged her as a founding member rather than for literary merit.¹⁰

Yet what constitutes the literary merit of Gregory's drama and to what extent did and does it succeed? First and foremost, Gregory emerges from this study as a creative and experimental playwright who skilfully deployed various techniques such as disguise, symbolism, allegory, and double endings. Whether her plots focused on public concerns such as jurisprudence or private concerns such as the education of her grandson, this study demonstrated the ways in which Gregory's drama is closely tied to contemporary political and cultural concerns, including Home Rule and a resurgent interest in Jacobitism. Whereas some might argue that it is such timeliness that renders Gregory's plays outdated in the twenty-first century, the continuous tension between public and private politics has a lingering topicality.

In the aftermath of the *Playboy* riots, Gregory demanded in an article published in *The Arrow* that 'The plays we have produced must be taken as a whole; there are types of nobility in them as well as of greed or folly. Seanchan's high pride stands against Dempsy's ignoble bendings'.¹¹ Not only is such an inclusive approach pivotal with regard to the Abbey's general diverse programme of productions, it is also crucial when considering the playwright's oeuvre. One of this study's most important contributions to Irish theatre history is its argument for the significance of hitherto neglected texts. The examples of *The White Cockade* and *Dave* illustrate the significance of such recoveries in terms of Gregory's relationship to her audience and the Revivalist's engagement with Jacobitism in the case of the former and previously unexplored points of influence on Yeats's more famous play

¹⁰ The name of the Lady Gregory Bridge was proposed for a new bridge between Marlborough Street and Hawkins Street and, although it made it into the final top 17, it has disappeared from the top ten list which included, among others, the options for W.B. Yeats and Abbey Theatre Bridge. Therewith disappeared the opportunity to reinvigorate her dramatic oeuvre. <http://www.rte.ie/news/2013/0516/450633-bridge-shortlist/> Accessed 24.06.2013. It is now the Rosie Hackett Bridge.

¹¹ Lady Gregory, 'An Explanation', *The Arrow* (1 June 1907), pp. 5-7.

Purgatory with regard to the latter. Likewise, critical and contextual analysis of the lesser known plays including *The Jester* and *The Dragon* enlighten our understanding of Gregory's class attitudes as well as her acceptance of and support for a patriarchal society. Particularly, the sustained elitism and conservatism expressed in these plays complicate the assertion of Gregory's 'inexorable movement towards rejection of the Ascendancy class views'.¹²

Willard Potts has argued that – contrary to the initial manifesto of the theatre to work against the buffoonery on stage – 'the difference between that stock figure [of the Stage-Irishman] and [Yeats's] comic peasants in *The Countess Cathleen* or those in the plays of Lady Gregory and Synge is hardly great enough to have cheered many Catholics'.¹³ Conversely, in its use of a highly divisive event in Irish history, *The White Cockade* is exceptional among the history plays of the Revivalists. As argued in Chapter Two, the play's provenance in late nineteenth-century Irish Jacobitism, its context and reception history challenges existing scholarship and makes a substantial contribution to our understanding of the Literary Revival. Rather than setting the play in the mythological past which provided a safe ground to unite society, Gregory directly addressed aspects of the divided present. With this play, the Protestant playwright successfully imagined the Catholic narrative of the Battle of the Boyne. In spite of Gregory's criticism of the blind sacrifice for the cowardly James II, *The White Cockade* was favourably received, most prominently in the pages of *The Leader*. As production figures and histories revealed, with few exceptions, Gregory's plays did cheer the audience of the Abbey; specifically, they cheered a Catholic audience.

Relatedly, Terence Brown asserts that the Revivalists engaged with a romantic and 'an ancient Ireland, heroic and self-sacrificially magnificent, in which unity of culture was

¹² James Pethica, 'A Dialogue of Self and Service: Lady Gregory's Emergence as an Irish Writer and Partnership with W.B. Yeats' (unpublished D.Phil. thesis, University of Oxford, Oxford, 1987), p. 95.

¹³ Willard Potts, *Joyce and the Two Irelands* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000), p. 15.

manifest in a pagan, mythic, rural paradise'.¹⁴ Yet Gregory's representation of the rural Irish cannot be classified as an example of such pure 'peasant worship', as generally attributed to the Revivalists.¹⁵ Rather than conceiving the early Abbey's directorate as a homogenous body, it is vital to Irish theatre history to pay tribute to the plurality of representations. By identifying considerable undervalued elements of realism and critical engagement in Gregory's work, this study challenges the playwright's place in the ideological tradition of the fetishisation of the Irish peasantry. Instead, we encounter a critical interrogation of shifting and conflicting loyalties, a realism that led to a continued questioning of political ideologies – be they imperialist or nationalist.

Reconsidering the Abbey's 'Advice to Playwrights', it was stated that 'We do not desire propagandist plays, nor plays written mainly to serve some obvious moral purpose; for art seldom conforms itself with realities of emotion and character that become self-evident when made vivid to the imagination'.¹⁶ This proclamation becomes problematic when considering particularly the context of MacSwiney's hunger strike as argued in Chapter One. The realities of every-day life, as presented in *The Gaol Gate*, *The Wrens*, *The White Cockade* and *Dave*, equally stand at odds with the 'Advice', as do the evidential autobiographical elements of *The Dragon* and *The Jester* that present examples where art conforms to the 'realities of emotion'. It has been shown that Gregory, rather than avoiding them, directly dealt with questions and historical events that pertain to 'the political questions that divide us'. As such, the project as well as the work can, indeed, be considered to be political. It appears that Gregory kept neither in line with the initial manifesto nor with the 'Advice to Playwrights'. She did, however, offer 'some criticism of life, [...] of Irish life by

¹⁴ Terence Brown, 'Cultural Nationalism 1880-1930', Seamus Deane et al, *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*, vol. II (Derry: Field Day Publications, 1991), p. 518.

¹⁵ Len Platt, *Joyce and the Anglo-Irish – A Study of Joyce and the Literary Revival* (Amsterdam/Atlanta: Rodopi, 1998), p. 173.

¹⁶ Lady Gregory, *Our Irish Theatre: A Chapter of Autobiography* (London/New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1913), p. 101, 9, 10.

preference'.¹⁷ This is most potent in her constant interrogation of the concept of nationalist martyrology and the effects it has on the every-day lives of the people.

Writing retrospectively on the founding of the Abbey Theatre in *Our Irish Theatre* (1913), Gregory quotes Aubrey de Vere's letter as the first response to the subscription for the Irish Literary Theatre:

Whatever develops the genius of Ireland, must in the most effectual way benefit her; and in Ireland's genius I have long been a strong believer. Circumstances of very various sorts have hitherto tended much to retard the development of that genius; but it cannot fail to make itself recognised before very long, and Ireland will have cause for gratitude to all those who have hastened to the coming of that day.¹⁸

Subtly, Gregory positioned herself at the top of the list of those Ireland should be grateful for – next to William Butler Yeats and John Millington Synge – her co-founders of the Abbey. Gregory attained her most enduring cultural legacy by becoming the patentee of the Abbey Theatre. In dedicating *Our Irish Theatre* to her grandson, Richard Gregory, the theatre – with herself at the centre – became a natural extension of Coole and her family's legacy; the national was linked with the personal, conflicting loyalties were subsumed in one common goal.

The different social and political spheres to which Gregory belonged played a vital part in terms of their impact on the playwright's work. In turn, her public work on the Abbey's stage as well as behind its curtains impacted on her private life. A better understanding of Gregory's dramatic oeuvre that reflects its complexity results in an alternative reading to the binary relationships of higher and lower class, Protestant dramatist and Catholic audience. The plays' production histories illustrate the plurality evident in national as well as international audience responses, enabling a broadening perspective on Abbey Theatre history. In light of this study, Gregory's role as the Abbey's patron and

¹⁷ Gregory, *Our Irish Theatre*, p. 9.

¹⁸ Gregory, *Our Irish Theatre*, p. 10.

director for nearly three decades is expanded to include the vital importance to the theatre's history of her work as a playwright. The prevalent disparity between critics in determining Gregory's political allegiances and the tendency to pinpoint a moment of conversion is misleading, and fails to give credit to Gregory's dramatic craft with its layered representation of Irish society.

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